

LISTENING FACTS

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Want to know what the studies say about listening? Below are different categories of “listening facts” that have been verified through research studies. They are organized by topic, for your convenience.

Listening Fact Categories...Press on the category to get there quickly, or peruse the list. The references for all facts are included at the end.

Time Spent Listening and Communicating
Listening and Communication Competence
Listening and Meaning
Listening and Memory
Listening and Speech Rates
Listening and Hearing
Listening and Leaders
Listening Styles

Listening and Supportive Communication
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TIME SPENT LISTENING AND COMMUNICATING

In Germany, Students in primary school are expected to listen for about 2/3 of classroom time (Weinhard, 2004).

In the U.S., the following studies have been conducted:

Study	Population	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Listening
Rankin, 1930	Varied	15%	11%	32%	42%
Brieter, 1971	Homemakers	10%	7%	35%	48%
Weinrauch and Swanda, 1975	Business Personnel	19%	23%	26%	33%
Werner, 1975	High school & college students, employees & homemakers	13%	8%	23%	55%
Barker et. al, 1980*	U.S. College Students	17%	14%	16%	53%
Bohlken, 1999	U.S. College Students	13%	12%	22%	53%
Davis, 2000*	Australian College Students	12.3%	9.8%	30.6%	34.1%
U.S. Department of Labor, 1991	Government Managers	13.3%	8.4%	23%	55%
Janusik & Wolvin, 2006	U.S. College Students	6%	8%	20%	24%

Average Daily Hours Dedicated to Communication Activities by Context

Janusik & Wolvin, 2006 N = 206 College Students	School		Friends		Work		Family	
	Hours	%	Hours	%	Hours	%	Hours	%
Writing	1.24	16	.24	2	.07	10	.02	3
Reading	.91	11	.26	2	.04	6	.02	3
Speaking	.95	12	2.54	23	2.00	28	1.6	25
Listening	2.22	28	2.29	21	2.01	28	1.4	23
Television	.51	6	1.20	11	.09	1	1.2	16
Radio	.22	3	.44	4	.03	5	.02	3
CDs/Tapes	.36	5	.74	7	.03	4	.03	5
Phone	.33	4	1.03	9	.06	9	.07	11
E-mail	.41	5	.71	6	.03	4	.03	4
Internet	.78	10	1.67	15	.04	6	.04	5

Total Daily Average Hours Dedicated to Communication Activities

Janusik & Wolvin, 2006 N = 206 College Students	Total Hours	Total %
Writing	1.82	8
Reading	1.40	6
Speaking	4.83	20
Listening*	5.80	24
Television*	2.12	9
Radio*	.86	4
CDs/Tapes*	1.32	5
Phone*	1.87	8
E-mail	1.33	6
Internet	2.73	11
*Total Listening Related Activities	11.97	50

* = Total Listening Related Activities combines listening, television, radio, CD's/Tapes, and Telephone

LISTENING COMPETENCE AND COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

Confident individuals listen to message content better than individuals who lack confidence (Clark, 1989).

People with less confidence in themselves tend to be better listeners for the emotional meaning of the spoken message (Clark, 1989).

Being more willing to communicate and less apprehensive about listening and speaking is an indicator of better listening comprehension (Clark, 1989).

When learning a foreign language, one's grammar improves if one learns to listen to the language prior to speaking it (Benson, & Heilt, 1978).

Both business practitioners and academics listed listening as one of the most important skills for an effective professional, yet only 1.5% of articles in business journals dealt with listening effectiveness (Smeltzer, 1993).

Individuals agree less on the ratings of good listeners, but agree more on the ratings of poor listeners (Cooper & Buchanan, 2003).

Listening accounts for approximately 1/3 of the characteristics perceivers use to evaluate communication competence in co-workers (Arnold, 1995).

Listening and listening-related abilities such as understanding, open-mindedness, and supportiveness constitute the single dimension upon which people make judgments about communication competence (Wienmann, 1977).

An individual's willingness to listen is positively correlated with communication skills and negatively related to receiver apprehension and sender based communication apprehension (Roberts & Vinson, 1998).

Listening is an important component in how people judge communicative competence in the workplace (Haas & Arnold, 1995). Further, individual performance in an organization is found to be directly related to listening ability or perceived listening effectiveness (Haas & Arnold, 1995)

LISTENING AND MEANING

In a spoken message, 55% of the meaning is translated non-verbally, 38% is indicated by the tone of voice, while only 7% is conveyed by the words used (Mehrabian, 1981).

Spoken words only account for 30 -35% of the meaning. The rest is transmitted through nonverbal communication that only can be detected through visual and auditory listening (Birdwhistell, 1970).

LISTENING AND MEMORY

On average, viewers who just watched and listened to the evening news could only recall 17.2% of the content when not cued, and the cued group never exceeded 25% (Stauffer, Frost, & Rybolt, 1983).

In a linear one-way listening task, when presented with a list of words, people can remember, on average, 7 items (Miller, 1956).

When presented with a series of unrelated sentences and asked to remember the last word of each sentence, people can remember, on average, 2.805 items (Janusik, 2004).

In a dynamic, conversational listening task, where people must remember a series of related questions and respond to them, people can remember and respond to 2.946 items (Janusik, 2004).

LISTENING AND SPEECH RATES

The average person talks at a rate of about 125 – 175 words per minute, while we can listen at a rate of up to 450 words per minute (Carver, Johnson, & Friedman, 1970).

LISTENING AND HEARING

For statistics about hearing disorders, ear infections, and deafness, see the National Institute on Deafness and Other Disorders website at <http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/statistics/hearing.asp> and <http://deafness.about.com/cs/earbasics/a/demographics.htm>.

LISTENING AND LEADERS

Listening is tied to effective leadership (Bechler & Johnson, 1995; Johnson & Bechler, 1998).

Leaders give good attention to the speaker by looking the speaker in the eye (Orick, 2002).

Leaders paraphrase the speaker to ensure understanding of the speaker's message (Orick, 2002).

Leaders are able to relate accurate messages to a third party, which shows that they listening to and remembered what the original speaker had said (Orick, 2002).

Leaders listen with an open mind by not becoming emotional or defensive (Orick, 2002).

Leaders can listen to a speaker and be respectful by not betraying the confidence of the speaker when asked to do so (Orick, 2002).

LISTENING STYLES

People listen through one of four primary styles, including people oriented, time oriented, action oriented and content oriented. Females are more likely to be people-oriented and males are more likely to be action, content, or time oriented (Barker & Watson, 2000).

40 % of individuals choose to listen with two or more distinct styles (Weaver, Richendoller, & Kirtley, 1995).

One's schema, agentic or communal, is a better predictor of listening style preference than one's gender (Johnson, Weaver, Watson, & Barker, 2000).

Those with a high people-orientation have a low apprehension for receiving information (Bodie & Villaume, 2003).

LISTENING AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNICATION

People have a general tendency to prefer the help of informal caregivers to formal helpers (Barker & Pistrang, 2002).

There is conflicting evidence of what "effective support" entails. Dunkel-Schetter and Wortman (1982) report that potential support providers believe that "patients should avoid thinking or talking about negative aspects of their situation and try to be as cheerful and optimistic as possible" (p. 82). Dakof and Taylor (1990) found, in general, victims of major life stressors having been exposed to (a) inappropriate responses (e.g., minimization, criticizing), (b) individuals who fail to express concern, empathy or affection, and (c) avoidance from one or more network members including medical professionals. Similarly, Perrine (1993) reports a study that suggests potential support providers have a greater tendency to want to solve problems than to engage in supportive listening behaviors. In other words, informal help providers may avoid listening to the distressed other that may lead the distressed other to feel worse rather than better.

The two most "helpful" listening behaviors when interacting with the bereaved include 1) provide the opportunity to ventilate, and (2) presence ("being there") (Lehman, Ellard, and Wortman, 1986).

Supporters who are effective listeners provide more direct eye contact, are receptive to disclosures, and ask more follow-up questions (Miller, Berg, & Archer, 1983).

LISTENING BARRIERS

The most frequently reported listening barriers among students are listening primarily for details or facts; becoming distracted by noise; daydreaming or becoming preoccupied with something else while listening; thinking of another topic or detouring because of what the speaker has said; and lack of interest in the speaker's subject (Golen, 1990).

The top three reported listening barriers for business students were identified as 1) Personal disinterest in the topic, 2) Personal and internal distractions, such as hunger, headache, or preoccupation with something else, and 3) Inattentiveness such as daydreaming. The top three reported listening barriers for business practitioners were identified as 1) Environmental distractions such as phones ringing and other people talking, 2) Personal and internal distractions, such as hunger, headache, or preoccupation with something else, and 3) Rebuttal tendency – developing a counter argument while the speaker is still speaking (Watson & Smeltzer, 1984).

LISTENING ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

Elementary students reported themselves as having better attention spans than all other ages and groups (Halone, Wolvin, & Coakley, 1997).

High school students rate themselves as better able to listen than elementary students, young adults, colleges students, adults, and the elderly (Halone, Wolvin, & Coakley, 1997).

30% of the elderly admit to having poor or very poor hearing; however, only 45% reported having the opportunity to listen to thoughtful communication (Halone, Wolvin, & Coakley, 1997).

LISTENING AND BUSINESS

Listening has been identified as one of the top skills employers seek in entry-level employees as well as those being promoted (AICPA, 2005; Goby & Lewis, 2000; Hynes, & Bhatia, 1996; James, 1992; Maes, Weldy, & Icenogle, 1997; Waner, 1995; Willmington, 1992; Winsor, Curtis, & Stephens, 1997).

Consider the following rankings of what's important in the interview process. The following numbers represent how private industry ranked the importance of the item, with 1 being the most important.

	Curtis, Winsor, & Stephens (1989)	Maes, Weldy, & Icenogle (1997)	Winsor, Curtis, & Stephens (1997)
Oral Communication	1	1	1
Listening	2	1	3
Problem Solving		2	
Enthusiasm	3		4
Self-Motivation		3	
Written Communication	4		2
Technical Competence	5		5
GPA/Academic Performance	11	13	16

As of the late 1990's, 64% of organizations provided some sort of listening training for their employees because they find that employees' listening skills are ineffective for today's work environment (What Employers Teach, 1997).

LISTENING AND EDUCATION

Even though most of us spend the majority of our day listening, it is the communication activity that receives the least instruction in school (Coakley & Wolvin, 1997). Listening training is not required at most universities (Wacker & Hawkins, 1995). Students who are required to take a basic communication course spend less than 7% of class and text time on listening (Janusik, 2002; Janusik & Wolvin, 2002). If students aren't trained in listening, how do we expect them to improve their listening?

Listening is critical to academic success. An entire freshman class of over 400 students was given a listening test at the beginning of their first semester. After their first year of studies, 49% of students scoring low on the listening test were on academic probation, while only 4.42% of

those scoring high on the listening test were on academic probation. Conversely, 68.5% of those scoring high on the listening test were considered Honors Students after the first year, while only 4.17% of those scoring low attained the same success (Conaway, 1982).

Students do not have a clear concept of listening as an active process that they can control. Students find it easier to criticize the speaker as opposed to the speaker's message (Imhof, 1998).

Effective listening is associated with school success, but not with any major personality dimensions (Bommelje, Houston, & Smither, 2003).

Students report greater listening comprehension when they use the metacognitive strategies of asking pre-questions, interest management, and elaboration strategies (Imhof, 2001).

Students self-report less listening competencies after listening training than before. This could be because students realize how much more there is to listening after training (Ford, Wolvin, & Chung, 2000).

Listening and nonverbal communication training significantly influences multicultural sensitivity (Timm & Schroeder, 2000).

LISTENING AND HEALTHCARE

Physicians interrupt 69% of patient interviews within 18 seconds of the patient beginning to speak. As a result, in 77% of the interviews, the patient's true reason for visiting was never elicited (Lee, 2000).

Patients are less likely to sue practitioners with good bedside manners. In fact, 2/3rds of all malpractice cases were tied to breakdowns in communication. Conversely, medical practitioners with better communication skills were less likely to be involved in malpractice cases (Hickson, et. al, 1992).

Patients are dissatisfied with the way that physicians communicate, citing them as lacking concerns and empathy (Korsch et. al, 1968; Lane, 1983; Schulman, 1978; Zimmerman & Arnold, 1990).

Residents of a nursing care facility were more satisfied with nursing assistants that had specific listening training as opposed to those who weren't trained (Trahan & Rockwell, 1999).

Health care practitioners who use more patient-centered communication, including listening, have patients who are more satisfied with their practitioners and their overall medical care (Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield & Gruber, 2004).

Effective listening is a significant predictor for patient satisfaction (Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield & Gruber, 2004).

In health care settings, the largest indicators of patient satisfaction with physician's communication skills are immediacy behaviors, empathy, and listening (Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, & Gruber, 2004)

Patients are more satisfied with oncologists who use shared decision-making strategies, including active listening, when deciding treatment (Brown, et. al, 2002).

Physicians who use a biopsychosocial approach with patients, including expressing empathy, involving patients in decision-making, asking open-ended questions, and listening attentively, take no more time per average office visit and produce increased patient satisfaction, which leads to better and more responsible decisions, and increases the patient's willingness to carry out the prescribed treatment (du Pre, 2001).

The most important communication skill in the doctor-nurse relationship, as well as the nurse-patient relationship, is listening (Worobey & Cummings, 1984). Further, nurses identify listening as highly important when dealing with doctors, patients, and hospital administrators (Worobey & Cummings, 1984).

Active listening on the part of both the physician and the patient increased compliance and the perception of a supportive atmosphere (Hausman, 2001).

Naturopathic patients rated their physician significantly higher in empathy than patients of conventional physicians (Arnold & Shirreffs, 1998).

LISTENING AND SPIRITUALITY/RELIGION

The earliest Jesuit missionaries made it a point to enter new locations and not speak for approximately 6 months. Instead, they listened. They recognized the importance of understanding where the other was before attempting to educate.

The metaphor of the word of the Lord also expresses what discernment essentially is. "The word of the Lord came to me, saying. . ." is a favored image among many of the biblical prophets. The word of God is creative, energetic, enlightening, fruitful, lifegiving (Is 55:10–11). The prophet's gift and task is to have a disciple's ear (Is 50:4–5) to receive the word of the Lord in whatever context God chooses to speak; to distinguish between the genuine word of God and what cleverly but deceitfully masquerades as God's word; to read the circumstances of everyday life through the lens of God's word; to act upon the word and to recall the people to fidelity to it. To be unable or unwilling to receive the word of the Lord is to deprive oneself of the source of life, goodness, wisdom, and creativity. Discernment, then, is the ability both to allow one's own life to be formed and guided by the word of God, and to play an appropriate part in ensuring that this word also guides the life and shapes the structures of community (Lonsdale, 1992, 51).

"*Spiritual direction* is a ministry of care and support for another that focuses on the primacy of relationship with God" (Barry and Connolly, 1982). Originating in the first century predominately in the domain of priests, it evolved to its present form in the 15th Century as an ascetic discipline practiced by men and women in the Roman Catholic church. . . . Spiritual direction is now identified as a valid ministry for laity as well as religious leaders and is a

popular practice with Protestants. The practice has also spread to the Jewish and Muslim faiths” (Tisdale, 2003). A key component of the ministry is listening.

Christian tradition emphasizes listening over transmitting. The first calling of disciples of Jesus Christ is to be good listeners, not speakers. . . .Practically speaking, Christian educators should be quick to listen because without practicing listening well, they cannot love God or others - including students, parents, colleagues, constituencies, and communities” (Shultze, 4004).

“The effective group leader or counselor will be a person who learns how to listen to other people. By studying and employing these listening skills, church leaders will be able to engage others more compassionately, allowing them to feel that their needs are being met” (Savage, 1996).

“After almost a decade of facilitating dialogue groups, I realized that the art of listening was the main skill that was missing for most participants. From that very real need, I developed The Listening Center in California five years ago, at a time in my life when the connection between listening and the circle of life became clear to me in all its sacredness” (Lindhahl, 2002).

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