



Report prepared for

SAM SAMPLE

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This report presents your results from the **Learning to Listen** assessment.





The Importance of Listening

■ Customer Service

Listening patiently and helping the customer fully express him- or herself can give you the extra insight you need to answer questions or solve problems in a way that truly satisfies the customer.

■ Teamwork

When team members are able to establish and maintain the habit of listening to one another, they are better able to share ideas, solve problems, and make the best use of each team member's unique talents.

■ Decision Making

Making the best possible decisions requires knowing all of the available information — not just the happy or sugar-coated news. Having the reputation of being a good listener can help others feel comfortable sharing the whole story with you, without fear that you will “shoot the messenger.”

■ Sales

Listening to a customer's needs before you start talking about features and benefits can provide the information you need to tailor your presentation to what really matters to the customer.

■ Managing/Supervising

Listening with compassion and respect is one of the best ways for managers to develop a strong rapport with their employees. It also opens the door for employees to share their ideas, suggestions, and concerns — all of which can contribute to a more effective organization.

■ Negotiating

Listening with an open mind while keeping your emotions in check is one of the best ways to find clues as to what terms the other party will and won't accept.

■ Personal Relationships

Listening without judging is one of the things we can give that others value most.



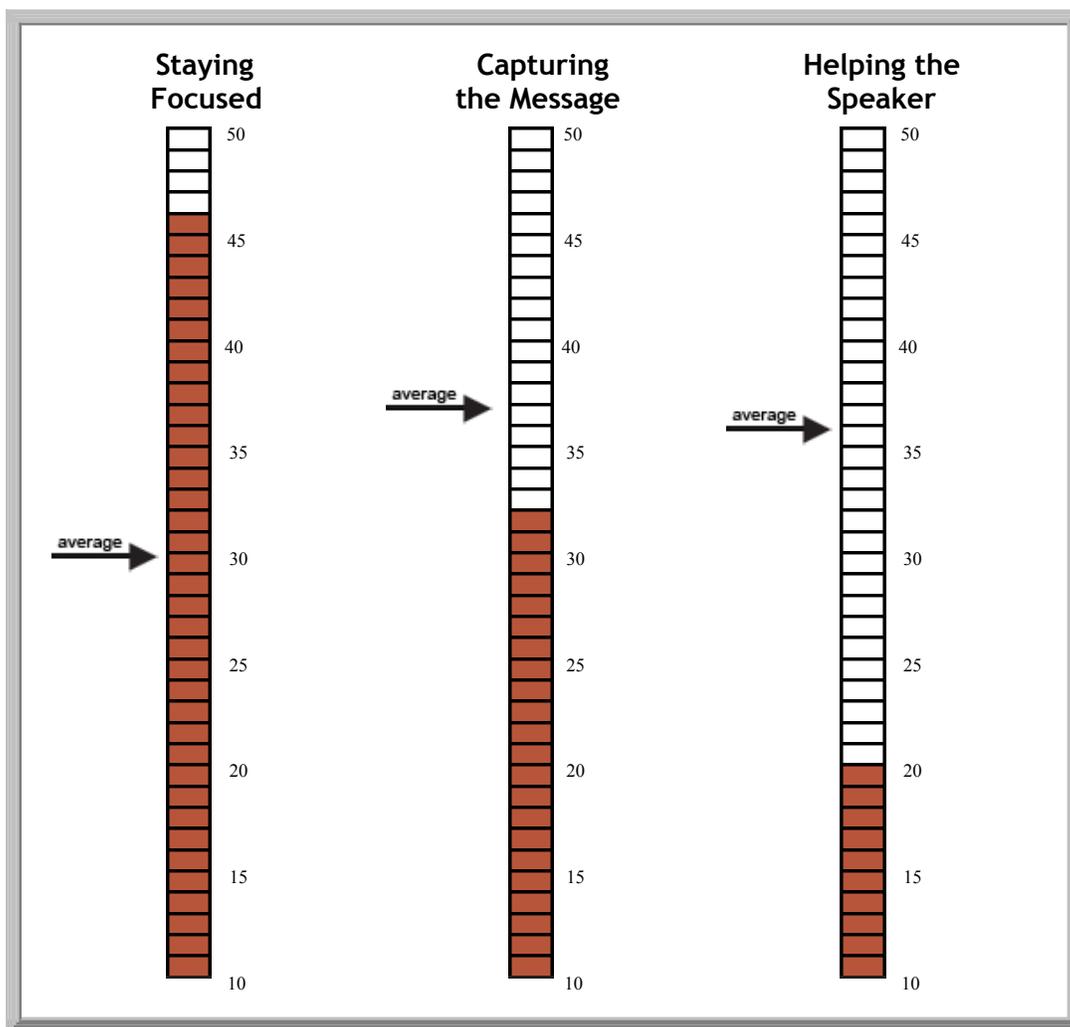
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Your Results



Key Dimensions of Learning



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- Super Star**
(136–150)
- Effective**
(121–135)
- Room for Improvement**
(61–120)
- Danger Zone**
(0–60)

Your Listening Meter

A Note about Averages

While it is often helpful to see how you compare with others on skills such as listening, it is important to keep in mind that the goal is always to improve personal performance, regardless of whether your individual scores are higher, lower, or about the same as the average.



Interpreting Your Scores

What Is Listening?

Listening is both visible and invisible. The visible aspects (such as an alert posture, eye contact, and encouraging body language) help reassure the speaker that the listener is actually listening. The invisible aspects, or what's going on in the mind of the listener, are much more difficult for the speaker to immediately assess, but in the long run, their existence or absence becomes evident through the quality of the listener's response. These invisible aspects also have a great impact on whether or not the listener actually receives the speaker's message.

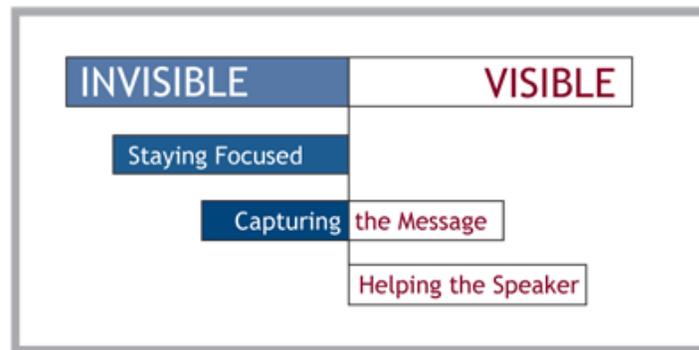
Successful listening requires that the listener actively carry out both the visible and invisible aspects of listening. That is, you must truly be paying attention and you must regularly be sending the speaker signals to prove it. For example, if you are nodding your head in agreement as your boss explains a new policy but you're really busy thinking about what to make for dinner tonight, then you have covered the visible aspect of listening, but neglected the invisible aspect. The listening process has broken down because you really didn't receive the information the boss was telling you. This could be a big problem if your job performance depends on your understanding the new policy.

Let's consider another example. This time you are actually paying attention and mentally processing some bad news being given to you by a co-worker, but because what he or she has to say is so upsetting, you are finding it difficult to maintain eye contact. The listening process has broken down again — you are doing the hard, invisible work of listening, but without strong visible signs, the speaker doesn't perceive that you are. This can cause problems if your co-worker interprets your lack of feedback as an indication that you don't care, are ignoring him or her, or don't understand the message. You could cause hurt feelings, misunderstandings, or subject yourself to a repeat of the unpleasant information as your co-worker attempts to get his or her message across to you.



The Listening Model

The visible and invisible aspects of listening fall into three major categories, which we call the Dimensions of Listening. We have arranged these Dimensions in a model that shows the extent to which each Dimension is visible, invisible, or a combination of both.



The Listening Model

- The first Dimension, **Staying Focused**, is entirely invisible because it involves actions that happen inside the mind of the listener.
- The second Dimension, **Capturing the Message**, is both visible and invisible. It involves actions that are invisible, such as keeping an open mind and mentally processing information, while performing other actions that are visible, such as asking questions and offering summaries.
- The third Dimension, **Helping the Speaker**, is entirely visible. It involves the outward signals, both verbal and physical, that a listener sends to convey respect for and encourage the other person.

The next section provides a description of each Dimension, some suggestions for improving personal performance, and an explanation of your score.



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Staying Focused

When we are listening there are many distractions that can tempt our minds to wander. Some of these distractions originate within the listener. For instance, we may have a personal problem that we are worrying about, or we may not be at all interested in the other person's subject matter so we start thinking about plans for the weekend. Other distractions are environmental, such as loud machinery, ringing phones, or a desk covered with work waiting to be done. The speaker or aspects of his or her message are other potential sources of distraction. We can become mesmerized by something the person is wearing or become irritated by or mentally stuck on something he or she has said.

Regardless of the source of the distraction, the outcome is the same: our minds have tuned out or tuned into something other than the conversation at hand. The fact that all of this activity is invisible to the speaker makes it no less important to manage.

Staying Focused is about consciously clearing the mental space in which to listen and then keeping your full attention centered on the speaker. It requires that you constantly monitor and control your own thought traffic — pulling yourself back from mental detours or the occasional daydream when necessary. Clearly, a high degree of self-awareness and the ability to exercise self-discipline are keys to Staying Focused.



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Your Score on Staying Focused

The *Learning to Listen* assessment asked you questions about the extent to which you use specific listening behaviors to stay focused. If any of your responses resulted in a low score, they will appear in a shaded box below. These items are a good starting point for you to improve your listening effectiveness. The tips on the next page will help you begin that process.

Your score on this dimension suggests that you usually devote your full, undivided attention to the speaker. When you do experience the occasional lapse in concentration, you tend to pick up on it, and mentally return yourself to the conversation. You probably prepare yourself to listen and have found ways to minimize the things that typically distract you.



Tips for Staying Focused

If staying focused doesn't come naturally for you, there are actions you can take to help improve this skill:

- Mentally prepare to listen**
Visually gather all of your other concerns or worries together and put them aside in a safe place until after the conversation.
- Create an environment conducive to listening**
Clear off your desk, but have pen and paper close at hand. Hold incoming calls and unscheduled appointments. Close your office door, or move to an area free of phones, equipment noise, and other conversations.
- Approach listening as an opportunity to learn**
This attitude can help give you a reason to stay mentally engaged in a conversation — even when the subject matter is difficult or the other person's delivery is dry.
- Give your mind a visual pointer**
Try watching the speaker's lips as he or she talks; it can help focus your concentration on what he or she is saying. Where it is culturally appropriate, seek and maintain eye contact with the speaker.
- Know when to delay listening**
Occasionally, circumstances may not be conducive to listening and you may be better off rescheduling the conversation if possible.



Capturing the Message

Another aspect of listening is building a complete and accurate understanding of the speaker's message. To do so, you will need to remain open to the speaker's message while you are mentally interacting with his or her ideas and information. These are the invisible aspects of Capturing the Message. The visible aspects are all of the verbal interactions that you initiate with the speaker in order to make sure that you have truly grasped his or her message. These include questions you ask to clarify the speaker's points and summaries you offer to confirm your understanding of the speaker's central ideas.

Being open to any possible message requires that you maintain a state of mental neutrality. This means putting aside your assumptions, prejudices, biases, and oversensitivities long enough to hear the speaker out. It also means delaying judgment until the speaker has had his or her say and not projecting your expectations for the conversation onto the speaker's message. In other words, don't listen only for what you want to hear.

Mentally interacting with the speaker's ideas and information means trying to make sense of what the speaker is saying. This involves extracting the speaker's main ideas from his or her entire message, watching for nonverbal cues that confirm or contradict the speaker's words, and taking steps to remember the essence of the exchange.



Your Score on Capturing the Message

The *Learning to Listen* assessment asked you questions about the extent to which you use specific listening behaviors to capture messages. If any of your responses resulted in a low score, they will appear in a shaded box below. These items are a good starting point for you to improve your listening effectiveness. The tips on the next page will help you begin that process.

Your score on this Dimension suggests you may leave conversations unsure of what the speaker was trying to say, or you may find out later that you misunderstood his or her message. You may have difficulty hearing people out or separating what you think about the speaker as a person from what you think of his or her message. Asking questions may be uncomfortable for you, and you are as likely to take too many notes as you are to take too few or none. It is possible that you concentrate so much on getting the facts or details that you miss the larger message or the nonverbal cues that are supporting or contradicting the speaker's words. Others may express frustration in trying to get their ideas or information across to you.

There may be some specific aspects of Capturing the Message that you need to improve. Review the following items in which you scored low:

- I remain open to hearing the rest of the other person's message even after he or she presents ideas with which I disagree.
- I decide what I think about the other person's ideas while he or she is talking. (-)*
- I anticipate what the other person's main point or conclusion is going to be before he or she is finished talking. (-)*
- I avoid asking the other person to repeat or clarify a point that I don't fully understand. (-)*
- I make a mental note of any ideas or arguments that the other person frequently repeats during a conversation.
- I listen for the overall theme behind the other person's message.
- I judge someone's message based on what I think of him or her as a person. (-)*

* This statement is reverse-scored; Almost Always and Most of the Time responses indicate less skill. Almost Never and Occasionally indicate more skill. All reverse-scored statements are identified with a (-) sign.



Tips for Capturing the Message

To make Capturing the Message a bit easier, try the following actions:

Humanize the speaker

Consciously think of at least one aspect of the speaker that you really appreciate or admire. This will help you feel more open to his or her ideas — even if you generally don't like the person or tend to disagree with him or her.

Take strategic notes

When a speaker introduces his or her main points or explains the order in which he or she intends to cover them, write this down. Briefly fill in under these headings as the speaker talks. Then, use the notes to create a summary at the end of the conversation and to remember what was said.

Don't miss the forest for the trees

By becoming too enamored with the interesting facts or statistics that a speaker uses to support his or her argument, you can fail to grasp his or her overall idea.

Practice asking different questions

Good listeners have a variety of questions at their disposal, including ones that follow up on ideas presented by the speaker, ones that request more information, and ones that clarify or confirm understanding.

Create comprehension check-points

During longer conversations, paraphrase points immediately after the speaker has completed making them. This helps nip potential misunderstandings in the bud.



Helping the Speaker

Actively Helping the Speaker may seem above and beyond the call of duty but, in fact, it is an integral part of your role as a listener. And like most things in life, by Helping the Speaker, you end up helping yourself, too. By purposely sending regular, encouraging signals to the speaker, you actually reinforce the behaviors that help keep you listening. It is easier to keep paying attention when you are leaning forward and maintaining eye contact with the speaker than it is when you are chewing on your pen and looking out the window.

As a listener, there are two major ways that you can Help the Speaker. The first involves *avoiding* the kind of behaviors that suggest you are not really paying attention: gazing out the window, fidgeting, interrupting, changing the subject, and finishing sentences for the other person. These actions, all of which are highly visible, can be very distracting and distressing to someone who is trying to communicate with you. Try instead to demonstrate the same kind of respect that you desire and appreciate.

The second way you can Help the Speaker is by actively *giving* supportive feedback, whether verbal or nonverbal. This kind of feedback is very encouraging to a speaker because it provides confirmation that you really are paying attention to him or her (Lewis, 1989). For instance, leaning forward and maintaining eye contact tells the speaker you are interested in his or her message and mentally tuned in. Using your facial expressions to convey an appropriate emotional reaction to the speaker's message also tells him or her that you are following the conversation. Verbal feedback can range from the simple, "Yes, I see," to being able to remind the speaker of what he or she was saying before an interruption or break in train of thought.



Your Score on Helping the Speaker

The *Learning to Listen* assessment asked you questions about the extent to which you use specific listening behaviors to help the speaker. If any of your responses resulted in a low score, they will appear in a shaded box below. These items are a good starting point for you to improve your listening effectiveness. The tips on the next page will help you begin that process.

Your score on this Dimension suggests you may display physical actions that convey your less-than-complete listening. For example, you may slump or fidget in your chair, sort through papers on your desk, allow your eyes to wander across the room, or stare blankly conveying little or no reaction through your facial expression. Verbal indications that you are not fully listening may include “yes-ing” the other person even though you are not paying attention, changing the subject, running over his or her sentences, and being at a complete loss to help the other person continue after an interruption.

There may be some specific aspects of Helping the Speaker that you need to improve. Review the following items in which you scored low:

- I try not to fidget during conversations. (For example, playing with paper clips, chewing on a pen, drumming my fingers.)
- I nod my head or indicate agreement verbally even when I'm not completely paying attention to what the other person is saying. (-)*
- I tend to finish sentences for the other person. (-)*
- I do something else such as open mail, file papers, or eavesdrop on other conversations while I'm listening. (-)*
- I maintain eye contact with any person who is speaking to me.
- When the other person seems to be stuck on a single point, I will ask a question that encourages him or her to move on to other points.
- If the other person loses his or her train of thought, I offer assistance by restating the point.
- If the other person fails to make a point that he or she mentioned at the beginning of the conversation, I remind him or her about it.
- I use nonverbal signals such as leaning forward and maintaining an alert posture to let the other person know I'm paying attention.
- I use pauses in the conversation to change the subject. (-)*

* This statement is reverse-scored; Almost Always and Most of the Time responses indicate less skill. Almost Never and Occasionally indicate more skill. All reverse-scored statements are identified with a (-) sign.



Tips for Helping the Speaker

In order to improve your ability to Help the Speaker, you will need to erase some bad habits and develop more positive ones. Here are a few ways to do this:

Take a breath before you interrupt

Every time you have the urge to finish a thought for the other person or change the subject altogether, practice holding your tongue through at least another sentence. Over time, you will find that your desire to be the one talking gradually declines.

Put your ego on hold

Proactively Helping the Speaker is a supporting role, not a starring role. In many ways, being a listener requires that we relinquish the limelight to the speaker. This can take practice.

Eliminate distractions

If you have a weakness for gazing out windows, close the blinds. If you are prone to chewing on pens, doodling on paper, or playing with paper clips, make sure you remove these temptations from your listening environment before starting a conversation.

Prepare to be tested

Pretend that you will be asked to present a formal report about the conversation. This false pressure can provide the motivation you need to take some personal responsibility for the speaker's success.

Put yourself in the speaker's shoes

Feeling empathetic toward the speaker makes you more aware of what you need to do to help a particular speaker in a particular situation.



Taking Action to Continue Learning

Now that you have learned more about the Dimensions of Listening and considered how your performance varies across the Dimensions, you are ready to begin planning ways to improve your listening skills.

General Questions

- 1** On which Dimension of Listening did you have the highest score? Why are you particularly good at practicing the behaviors associated with this Dimension? How could you apply that personal advantage to other Dimensions of Listening?
- 2** On which Dimension of Listening did you have the lowest score? Why are the behaviors associated with this Dimension particularly difficult for you to practice? How might you overcome those challenges to listening?
- 3** When you realize that you have failed to listen, which Dimension of Listening is most often related to that failure? How is this reflected in your scores?

