

***'I like to listen. I have learned a great deal from listening carefully.  
Most people never listen.'* - Ernest Hemingway**

- Think of a situation when you were truly listened to. How did you feel? How did you know you were listened to?
- Think of an opposite situation: you were not listened to. How did you feel? How could you tell? What could have been done to improve this situation?
- Is listening the same as hearing? Is listening about comprehending?

Now that you've reflected on the initial questions above, how would you define what it means to listen? How do you listen?

Try putting 'listening' as a key word in our library's online catalogue and you'll see how applicable and important the concept and process of listening is in many contexts. This short self-reflective guide is not meant to give you a critical analysis and/or evaluation of academic theories, nor is it designed to give you a generic step by step instruction. Our purpose is to inspire you in your own reflections on the value of effective listening as a unique tool to use and harness when communicating at the University, outside the University and beyond, and to see the real benefits of doing so! Listening is a very personal, complex and ongoing process. Consider how harnessing your listening can **enable you** to become a better and more effective lifelong learner and communicator, how it can help you develop personally and professionally and how you can engage with the world around you through this vital skill.

Our daily life is filled with listening: we listen to our friends, families, tutors, the media, etc... Sometimes we really concentrate on what others are saying and we really do pay attention, sometimes we don't: we only 'hear' or only pretend to listen. International Listening Association (ILA) defines listening as '*the process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages*' (Emmert, 1994, cited in Wolvin et al, 2010, p. 267). **Listening defined here is much more than just hearing!** It is not about receiving the sound or even comprehending the message; effective listening is about **how you approach** your communication with the other, how you engage in this process, with your knowledge, attitudes and behaviours.

Listening is an ongoing, dynamic and complex process. The 21st century brings many **challenges** to listening and communication. There are also listening **filters, both internal and external**, that may influence the listening process: people's different listening styles, cultures and backgrounds, time

pressures, our physical and psychological state (e.g. being stressed or tired), the environment (e.g. noise), our attitudes and assumptions, our prior knowledge.

And... we are only human! Have you ever done any of the following?

- ✚ 'Rehearsing': thinking of what you're going to say next rather than listening and concentrating?
- ✚ 'Mind reading': assuming you already know, without real listening, what the other person is thinking or feeling
- ✚ 'Filtering': listening selectively to what you really want to hear
- ✚ 'Dreaming': simply drifting off, switching off...
- ✚ 'Identifying': referring everything to your own experience, instead of putting yourself in the speaker's place and trying to see things from the other's point of view
- ✚ Any other? ...

Explore your listening habits and look at some listening tips and techniques on how to listen actively<sup>1</sup>

<sup>2</sup>. For a more in-depth exploration of listening, you may want to read up about the concepts of emphatic listening and critical listening, or consider the Integrative Listening Model (ILM)<sup>3</sup>.

Ultimately, practising good listening can help us understand a different perspective, help us learn

and truly engage, collaborate, build trust, develop ideas, develop ourselves. **Harnessing good**

**listening is therefore not only about developing a skill; it is about adopting a certain attitude and ultimately about developing your potential as the graduate of the University.**

- Have you experienced any barriers to effective listening, both as a listener AND one that is being listened to? If so, were you able to overcome these barriers? How?
- How can you utilise non-verbal communication (e.g. eye contact, posture, gesture) to improve the listening process?
- Let's think about your specific discipline and/or your career aspirations: how important is the ability to listen effectively in the sector (or specific profession) you have chosen? In what way? Try to come up with a few examples when good listening does make a big difference. If you don't have any specific career aspirations just yet, think about your discipline and talk to other students about it: sharing thoughts may be inspirational!

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.learnhigher.ac.uk/working-with-others/listening-and-interpersonal-skills/listening-and-interpersonal-skills-tutorial/>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.ted.com/talks/julian\\_treasure\\_5\\_ways\\_to\\_listen\\_better\\_or](http://www.ted.com/talks/julian_treasure_5_ways_to_listen_better_or): <http://blog.ted.com/2012/11/26/8-talks-on-the-importance-of-listening-and-how-to-do-a-much-better-job-of-it/>

<sup>3</sup> Wolvin, A. et al (2010) *Listening and Human Communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd