

Quick Guide: Hear what people say

Most people are good at talking, but we often have trouble listening. It takes a lot of concentration and determination to be an active listener. Old habits are hard to break and if your listening habits are as bad as many people's are, then there's a lot of habit breaking to do! So here are the **top ten tips** to help you:

1. **Watch your body language.** Make sure you face the speaker and maintain a level of eye contact where you all remain comfortable. Leaning forward slightly or sitting up straight will also show your attentiveness.
2. **Focus solely on what the speaker is saying.** Try not to think about what you are going to say next, as you will lose focus on what is being said.
3. **Minimise distractions,** especially if you are on the telephone. Notes, pens, files, clocks and knick knacks can distract you. You may not even be aware of the distraction until you realise you have no idea what the person just said.
4. **Don't interrupt:** it's a waste of time. It frustrates the speaker and limits full understanding of the message.
5. **Listen to the other person** as if you are going to report the message to someone else. This keeps you focused on the main reason, ideas or points of the conversation.
6. **Ask a question** instead of commenting on what a person has said. This will keep you listening longer, and often the added information will help you make a higher quality contribution to the conversation.
7. **If you are finding it particularly difficult** to concentrate on what someone is saying, try repeating their words mentally as they say it - this will reinforce their message and help you control mind drift.
8. **Let them know you are listening** by an acknowledgement such as a nod of the head or a simple "uh huh" or "mmmm". You aren't necessarily agreeing; you are indicating you are listening. (This also reminds you to pay attention!)
9. **Be deliberate with your listening** and remind yourself constantly that your goal is to truly hear and understand the other person's message.
10. **Finally, keep an open mind.** Wait until the speaker has finished before deciding that you disagree: active listening is a model for respect and understanding.

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