**Why don’t we listen?**

**Interpersonal Communications**

**Mz. Hope**

**Ted Talk:** [**https://www.ted.com/playlists/92/listen\_up**](https://www.ted.com/playlists/92/listen_up)

Sad as it may be, it is *impossible* to listen all of the time, for several reasons:

1. **Message overload**

The amount of speech most of us encounter every day makes careful listening to everything we hear impossible; **we spend half the time we are awake listening** to verbal messages: from instructors, co-workers, friends, family, salespeople, strangers, and mass media.

1. **Preoccupation**

We’re wrapped up in personal concerns; ie. Anticipating an upcoming test, the fight we had last night.

1. **Rapid thought**

Listening can be difficult due to physiological reasons: we’re capable of understanding speech at rates of up to **600 words per minute**, whereas the average person speaks between **100 and 150** words per minute. Thus we have a lot of “spare time”: daydreaming, thinking of our answer, personal interests. The trick is to use the spare time to work to understand the speaker.

1. **Effort**

Listening effectively is hard work. The physical changes that occur during listening include increased heart rate, respiration increases, body temperature rises.

1. **External noise**

The physical world provides a lot of distractions: traffic, music, others’ speech. It’s hard to listen well in a packed room.

1. **Hearing problems**

Youth are not going deaf, but they are becoming hard of hearing. Try this test: before attending a noisy event, sit in the car and put the radio on. Turn the volume down slowly until you can barely hear it. After the event, try listening to it again at the exact same volume and see if you can hear the voices. If you can’t, you were probably overexposed to noise. If you cannot hear it after 24 hours, you should see an audiologist or doctor.

1. **Faulty assumptions**

We often make incorrect assumptions that lead us to believe we are listening attentively when the opposite is true. We listen less when we think we know the subject, when we assume the speaker’s thoughts are too simple or too complex, or when we think the topic in unimportant.

1. **Lack of apparent advantages**

We often think we stand to gain more from speaking than from listening: ie, to be hired, to make a good impression, to communicate an informational piece. But we also think it gains us admiration, respect, and the liking of others. Talking also gives you the chance to release energy; if you are frustrated, talking it out can help. While this is true, listening has its payoffs too: being a good listener is one way to help others. It may be harder to be persuasive by listening rather than speaking, but listening is often reciprocal: you get what you give. Your willingness to listen will encourage others to listen to *you.*

1. **Lack of training**

A common mistake is the belief that listening is like breathing- an activity that people do well naturally, when actually, few people do it well. One study illustrates this: 144 managers were asked to rate their listening skills. Not one of them described themselves as a poor listener and 94% of them thought they were “good’ or “very good” at it. This contrasted sharply with what their subordinates reported, many of whom said their manager’s listening skills were weak. Listening can be improved through training.

1. **Media influences**

Contemporary mass media consists of short segments with a declining portion of text and a growing amount of graphical information. These trends discourage the kind of focused attention that is necessary for careful listening, especially to complicated ideas and feelings.