

Listening – what’s it all about?

Listening is more than hearing; it is sometimes described as hearing with attention. Certainly attention is needed. How often do you “hear” someone talking but because your attention is absorbed on something else, you don’t know what they have said!?

Why does listening matter?

Listening is vital for spoken language and for learning as well as social interaction. Listening is a two-way process - both listener and speaker have responsibilities. An active listener brings expectations to the situation, makes decisions about what to attend to, is always proactive in ensuring that interpretation is meaningful. Listening involves the organisation and use of auditory input to support interaction with the environment – people, events and experiences.

Listening requires and is closely intertwined with auditory attention. Listening is not just about the ears; it’s about the brain as well.

Listening involves:

- Detection of sound
- Discrimination of similarities and differences between sounds
- Identification of what sounds indicate
- Comprehension (understanding) of what sounds mean – particularly the meaning of the sounds of language.

Listening also involves:

- Self-monitoring and auditory feedback
- Memory
- Localisation
- Pragmatics – conversational listening skills; turn-taking - noting pauses; recognising and repairing misunderstandings; listening in groups
- The ability to listen in different conditions e.g. in poor acoustics
- The ability to listen to different sources – headphones / phones etc. which may present a limited frequency range – only part of the original sound

For anyone with hearing loss, it is vital that they

- are aware of their own listening difficulties
- understand different acoustic environments and their impact
- can effectively manage and maintaining their own equipment