



Pearson New International Edition

## Interpersonal Messages

Joseph A. DeVito  
Third Edition

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## MESSAGES IN THE MEDIA: WRAP UP



Television talk shows provide lots of examples of effective and ineffective listening. When you watch such shows, focus some attention to the listening patterns the panelists use. You'll learn a great deal about listening.

the other hand, are more likely to ask supportive questions and perhaps offer evaluations that are more positive than those of men. Men and women act this way to both men and women; their customary ways of talking don't seem to change depending on whether the listener is male or female.

Gender differences are changing drastically and quickly; it's best to take generalizations about gender as starting points for investigation and not as airtight conclusions (Gamble & Gamble, 2003). Further, as you no doubt observed, the gender differences—although significant—are far outnumbered by the similarities. It's important to be mindful of both similarities and differences.



Can you explain the major cultural and gender differences in listening and assess their influence on your own interpersonal interactions?

## SUMMARY OF CONCEPTS AND SKILLS



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*This chapter defined listening and some of its benefits; identified the five stages of listening; explained some of the barriers to listening, the styles of effective listening, and how best to adjust your listening to achieve maximum effectiveness; and looked at the wide cultural and gender differences in listening.*

1. Listening has both task and relationship benefits and serves the same purposes as communication: to learn, to relate, to influence, to play, and to help.

## The Stages of Listening

2. Listening may be viewed as a five-step process: receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating, and responding. Listening difficulties and obstacles exist at each of these stages.

## Listening Barriers

3. Among the obstacles to effective listening are physical and mental distractions, biases and prejudices, lack of appropriate focus, and premature judgment.



**Study** and **Review** materials for this chapter are at **MyCommunicationLab**

## Styles of Listening Effectively

4. Effective listening depends on finding appropriate balances among empathic and objective, nonjudgmental and critical, surface and depth, polite and impolite, and active and inactive listening.
5. Both listener and speaker share in the responsibility for effective listening.

## Listening, Culture, and Gender

6. Members of different cultures vary on a number of communication dimensions that influence listening: speech and language, nonverbal behavioral differences, and approaches to feedback.
7. Men and women appear to listen differently; generally, women give more specific listening cues to show they're listening than do men.

This chapter also covered a wide variety of listening skills. Check those that you wish to work on.

- 1. *Receiving*. Focus attention on both the verbal and the nonverbal messages; both communicate essential parts of the total meaning.
- 2. *Understanding*. Relate new information to what you already know, ask questions, and paraphrase what you think the speaker said to make sure you understand.
- 3. *Remembering*. Identify the central ideas of a message, summarize the message in an easier-to-retain form, and repeat ideas (aloud or to yourself) to help you remember.
- 4. *Evaluating*. Try first to understand fully what the speaker means, then look to identify any biases or self-interests that might lead the speaker to give an unfair presentation.
- 5. *Responding*. Express support for the speaker by using I-messages instead of you-messages.
- 6. *Empathic and objective listening*. Punctuate the interaction from the speaker's point of view, engage in dialogue, and seek to understand the speaker's thoughts and feelings.
- 7. *Nonjudgmental and critical listening*. Keep an open mind, avoid filtering out difficult messages, and recognize your own biases. When listening to make judgments, listen extra carefully, ask questions when in doubt, and check your perceptions before criticizing.
- 8. *Surface and depth listening*. Focus on both verbal and nonverbal messages, on both content and relationship messages, and on statements that refer back to the speaker. At the same time, do not avoid the surface or literal meaning.
- 9. *Active and inactive listening*. Be an active listener: Paraphrase the speaker's meaning, express understanding of the speaker's feelings, and ask questions when necessary.
- 10. *Cultural differences in listening*. Be especially flexible when listening in a multicultural setting, realizing that people from other cultures give different listening cues and may operate with different rules for listening.
- 11. *Gender differences in listening*. Understand that women give more cues that they're listening and appear more supportive in their listening than men.

## VOCABULARY QUIZ: The Language of Listening

Match these terms about listening with their definitions. Record the number of the definition next to the appropriate term.

- listening
- offensive listening
- receiving
- empathic listening
- supportive listening
- backchanneling cues
- active listening
- memory
- paraphrase
- evaluating

- 1. A reconstructive (not a reproductive) process.
- 2. A process of sending back to the speaker what the listener thinks the speaker means.

- 3. Hearing.
- 4. A stage in the listening process in which you make judgments about a message.
- 5. A restatement of something said in your own words.
- 6. Listening for ideas to attack.
- 7. A process of receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating, and responding to messages.
- 8. Listening in which you place yourself in the position of the speaker so that you feel as the speaker feels.
- 9. Responses listeners send back to the speaker as a kind of feedback.
- 10. Listening without judgment or evaluation; listening for understanding.

The above terms and additional key terms from this chapter can be found in the glossary.



## MyCommunicationLab

Visit MyCommunicationLab for additional information on listening. Flash cards, videos, skill building exercises, sample test questions, and additional examples and discussions will help you continue your study of the role of listening in interpersonal communication and the skills of effective listening.

## GLOSSARY OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION CONCEPTS AND SKILLS

Listed here are definitions of the technical terms of interpersonal communication—the words that are peculiar or unique to this discipline—along with relevant skills where applicable (in *italic*). These definitions and skill statements should make new or difficult terms a bit easier to understand and should serve as reminders of the skills discussed throughout this text. All boldface terms within the definitions appear as separate entries in the glossary.

**Active listening** The process by which a listener expresses his or her understanding of the speaker's total message, including the verbal and nonverbal, the thoughts and feelings. *Be an active listener: Paraphrase the speaker's meaning, express understanding of the speaker's feelings, and ask questions when necessary.*

**Backchanneling cues** Responses a listener makes to a speaker (while the speaker is speaking) but which do not ask for the speaking role, for example, interjections such as "I understand" or "You said what?" *Generally, give back-channeling cues to show that you're listening actively.*

**Direct speech** Speech in which the speaker's intentions are stated clearly and directly.

**Empathy** A quality of interpersonal effectiveness that involves sharing others' feelings; an ability to feel or perceive things from others' points of view. *Communicate empathy when appropriate: Resist evaluating the person, focus on the person, express active involvement through facial expressions*

*and gestures, reflect back the feelings you think are being expressed, self-disclose, and address mixed messages.*

**Indirect speech** Speech that hides the speaker's true intentions; speech in which requests and observations are made indirectly. *Use indirect messages when a more direct style might prove insulting or offensive, but be aware that indirect messages also may create misunderstanding.*

**Listening** An active process of receiving aural stimuli consisting of five stages: receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating, and responding. *Be especially flexible when listening in a multicultural setting, realizing that people from other cultures give different listening cues and may operate with different rules for listening.* **Long-term memory** The memory that holds an unlimited amount of information indefinitely.

**Short-term memory** The memory you use to remember information you need immediately or temporarily, for example, remembering a phone number just long enough to dial it.

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# Verbal Messages



## MESSAGES IN THE MEDIA

**OBJECTIVES** After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Paraphrase the eight principles of verbal messages.
2. Distinguish between disconfirmation and confirmation, and use appropriate cultural identifiers, without sexism, heterosexism, racism, and ageism.
3. Explain the ways in which language can distort thinking and apply the suggestions for greater guidelines for communicating more logically.

Cartoon shows are interesting in part because the characters are all given very distinctive verbal communication styles, making them all easily identifiable. In much the same way, we each have a distinctive verbal style that, as this chapter will demonstrate, can be improved and made more effective.



Listen to the **Audio Chapter**  
at **MyCommunicationLab**

From Chapter 5 of *Interpersonal Messages, Communication and Relationship Skills*, Third Edition. Joseph A. DeVito.  
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**Explore the Exercise**  
 “Integrating Verbal and  
 Nonverbal Messages” at  
**MyCommunicationLab**

As you communicate, you use two major signal systems—the verbal and the nonverbal. Verbal messages are those sent with words. The word *verbal* refers to words, not to oral-ity; verbal messages consist of both oral and written words. Verbal messages would not include laughter; vocalized pauses you make when you speak such as *er*, *hmm*, and *uh-uh*; and responses you make to others that are oral but don’t involve words such as *hah-hah*, *aha*, and *ugh*. These would be considered nonverbal—as are, of course, facial expressions, eye movements, gestures, and so on. This chapter focuses on verbal messages.

## PRINCIPLES OF VERBAL MESSAGES

A useful way to study verbal messages is to examine the principles that govern the way verbal messages work. Here we look at eight such principles: (1) meanings are in people, (2) messages are both denotative and connotative and communicate objective meanings as well as attitudes and values, (3) messages can be onymous or anonymous, (4) messages vary in abstraction, (5) messages vary in politeness, (6) messages vary in immediacy, (7) messages can deceive, and (8) messages vary in assertiveness.

### Message Meanings Are in People

If you wanted to know the meaning of the word *love*, you’d probably turn to a dictionary. There you’d find, according to Webster’s, “the attraction, desire, or affection felt for a person who arouses delight or admiration or elicits tenderness, sympathetic interest, or benevolence.” This is the denotative meaning. But where would you turn if you wanted to know what Pedro means when he says, “I’m in love”? Of course, you’d turn to Pedro to discover his meaning. It’s in this sense that meanings are not in words but in people. Consequently, to uncover meaning, you need to look into people and not merely into words.

Also recognize that, as you change, you also change the meanings you created out of past messages. Thus, although the message sent may not change, the meanings you created from it yesterday and the meanings you create today may be quite different. Yesterday, when a special someone said, “I love you,” you created certain meanings. But today, when you learn that the same “I love you” was said to three other people or when you fall in love with someone else, you drastically change the meanings you draw from those three words.

### Meanings Are Denotative and Connotative

Two general types of meaning are essential to identify: denotation and connotation. The term *denotation* refers to the meaning you’d find in a dictionary; it’s the meaning that members of the culture assign to a word. Connotation is the emotional meaning that specific speakers/listeners give to a word. Take as an example the word *death*. To a doctor, this word might mean (denote) the time when the heart stops. This is an objective description of a particular event. On the other hand, to a mother who is informed of her son’s death, the word means (connotes) much more. It recalls her son’s youth, ambitions, family, illness, and so on. To her, *death* is a highly emotional, subjective, and personal word. These emotional, subjective, or personal associations make up the word’s connotative meaning. The denotation of a word is its objective definition. The connotation of a word is its subjective or emotional meaning.

Semanticist S. I. Hayakawa (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1989) coined the terms “snarl words” and “purr words” to further clarify the distinction between denotative and connotative meanings. Snarl words are highly negative (“She’s an idiot,” “He’s a pig,” “They’re a bunch of losers”). Sexist, racist, heterosexist, and ageist language, and hate speech generally, provide lots of other examples. Purr words are highly positive (“She’s a real sweetheart,” “He’s a dream,” “They’re the greatest”).



**Explore the Concept**  
 “Verbal Communication” at  
**MyCommunicationLab**