

# Learning by listening



**You can learn a lot through listening. At university it will be a prime source of information and a starting point for your own study. Unfortunately, people do not instinctively listen well. Listening is a skill which must be developed.**

## **Eight suggestions for effective listening**

If you apply the following suggestions, you will find yourself listening more effectively, both in lectures and on other occasions.

1. Determine why what the speaker is saying is important to you. If you don't have an immediate, need to listen to a speaker, you are an unmotivated listener and your attention may wander.
2. Remember: the responsibility for interest and understanding lies with you, not with the speaker. Learning is up to the learner. If you simply want to sit passively and blame the speaker for your lack of success, then you are not a serious learner.
3. If you cannot hear, arrange things so you can. Move away from sources of noise - human or mechanical. Sit where you can see the speaker easily, and where other distractions are at a minimum.
4. Listen to what the speaker is saying. Do not tune the speaker out because you do not like something about him/her or the message. Be sure you understand something before you reject it. This is where pre-reading can be an advantage.
5. Look for the speaker's pattern of organisation. In a lecture, a speaker is generally referring to notes or some other source of information. You can understand much better if you are able to recognize what main points the speaker is moving towards and how the speaker's getting there. The building up of points towards a conclusion is a useful skill to develop for your own assignments. Again some pre-reading will help.
6. Look for the main idea or ideas of the presentation. Facts are important only as far as they support the speaker's points. If you have trouble distinguishing between the important and the trivial, a friend or a tutor in the Study Skills Centre can help you.
7. Do not let your mind wander. Your thoughts move far more rapidly than the swiftest mouth, and the urge to stray is tempting. Your attention span can be increased, however, through deliberate effort. Continue to practice the habit of attention and do not be discouraged by early failures.
8. For many people, making notes while listening even can be a useful way helping the memory. Jot things down in an abbreviated form (use keywords, symbols and bullet points). Translating things into an abbreviated form means that you have to focus and quickly think about what you are writing. This aids memory and understanding. However, this may not work for everyone but give it a try.