

Listening might be defined as the lost art of hearing and understanding what someone is saying. Each letter of the word **LISTEN** will guide you toward becoming a better listener.

LOOK - Instructors are generally consistent in their order of presentation as well as what they present. The lecture usually has five main parts:

1. **Introduction:** The opening statements
2. **Thesis Statement:** The topic to be covered
3. **Body:** Supporting evidence and information in relation to the topic
4. **Summary:** What the instructor covered that day
5. **Irrelevancies:** Filler or off-the-topic material

In addition, there is usually a structure to the "body" material, perhaps it is sequential or in a chronological pattern. Your understanding from listening will improve if you can see the order and consistency in the lecture and anticipate the next topics or words.

IDENTIFY - Identify why what the instructor is saying is important to you. You need a reason for wanting to listen or you will be unmotivated during the lecture. Do you want to learn the content? What part of it? Usually you will do well only when you intend to put effort and skill into the task. To be interested in the lecture and to understand its' content is your responsibility. It's up to you to get what you want out of your class.

SET UP - Set up your situation to maximize the possibility of hearing and staying in touch with the lecture. Your eyes, ears, and brain are parts of your listening apparatus. Take steps to insure the operation of each. Be rested enough for your brain to function. If you get sleepy, bring in some orange juice or coffee. Maintain eye contact to keep listening. Block out the noise and distractions by sitting where you will be least bothered: the front row. If you can't hear what is being said, by all means, move away from the problem -- whether it be human or mechanical.

TUNE IN - Learn to increase your attention span by timing just how long you can last before you think of something else. Write down the distracting thought and then set a goal a few minutes longer for the next "listening span." When your mind does wander, write down the thought and set a time when you will deal with it. Remember the brain works approximately four times faster than you can talk so there is time for the mind to roam if you don't have a plan. Knowing how the instructor stresses important content will help to keep tuned in. What words, visual or postural cues tell you that this information is important?

EXAMINE - Examine the context to determine the main points. Action verbs and content nouns will help you to focus. Not all the content given in the lecture is needed. Check your syllabus and text or ask your instructor before so that you will know what topics will be covered each day. By skimming the assignment in advance you can get a feel for the facts as opposed to the main points. This will keep your ear tuned to hear the important information rather than the trivial. Use questions or phrases such as "Let's see if I understand you" or "Is this what you mean?" to make sure you're on the right track. When you know what you have to add later, how much is repeated and how the key content is handled, you can listen for the main points more easily. A few days of careful editing of notes will also get you geared up to know what to listen for. When in doubt, check with the instructor or the teaching assistant.

NOTES - Taking notes while you listen will improve your concentration. The very act of taking notes may help you stay tuned in. Even if the material sounds familiar, write down a word or two to remind you of the topic was covered and to keep you listening. Once you are listening, think about how to write down the content you want.