Faulty listening is usually the result of distractions. For purposes of discussion, they can be classified as follows.

Listening Faults:

**Daydreaming**—This is the most prevalent listening fault, affecting everyone at some point. The speaker mentions an idea, which triggers associations in a listener’s mind. The person is lost for a time in his or her own thoughts. When they return to the discussion point three is being presented and they have no recollection of points one or two.

**Closed-Mindedness**—Listeners often refuse to listen to an opposing view when their minds are made up. They believe that they know all there is to know, so there’s no use listening. Actually, this is an intellectual fault rather than a listening problem. Any time one fails to listen with an open mind; they are doing themselves and the speaker a disservice. If the listener’s point of view is the correct one, opposing arguments will only serve to reinforce and confirm their beliefs. If, on the other hand, the listener’s position is wrong, refusing to listen will not make it right. Close-mindedness surely interferes with classroom learning.

**False Attention**—The fake listener goes through the motions of listening, even making an occasional comment, while their real attention is on something else. The listener may act interested but be a thousand miles away mentally. The danger is in allowing this to become a routine procedure whenever something considered uninteresting is presented.

**Intellectual Despair**—Listening can be difficult at times. In college, students have to sit through many lectures on subjects hard to understand. This situation should be expected because college is attended to learn. Occasionally students may feel the urge to give up. The thing to do is to listen more carefully than ever, ask questions when possible, or discuss the material with a classmate.

**Memorizing**—Some listeners try to memorize every word spoken by the lecturer. Don’t try to remember everything. Listen to distinguish major and minor points and their applications.
**Personality Listening**—It is only natural for listeners to appraise and evaluate a speaker, but impressions should not interfere with listening. Listen for content, not the charisma of the speaker.

**Positive Steps to Good Listening**

**Pay Attention**—Students consider lectures supplementary to the textbook, but the opposite is true. Learn to study while listening in class. Decide before class that the lecture period will be well spent; resolve to make it a learning experience.

**Watch the Speaker**—Don't take your eyes off the speaker except when taking notes. When the listener looks away, visual distractions compete for attention. Develop an awareness of the speaker's gestures and how they supplement his remarks, but be careful not to become distracted.

**Note Questions**—An inquisitive attitude facilitates learning. Listen well to questions asked in class. When the instructor asks a question, pay close attention because he is probably discussing something of importance. Notice questions asked by others in class. Students' questions signal the instructor: they tell them how their message is coming across. They will elaborate and illustrate, repeat and paraphrase to help the listeners understand.

**Listen Creatively**—Evaluate and organize the speaker's words. To listen totally, it is necessary to react; the listener's mind must be put to work. Become attuned to the speaker and anticipate what is coming. The listener's mind should be running on a "parallel track."

Success in college depends in large measure on good listening in class. The suggestions offered here can substantially increase competence in this vital area.

Adapted from a handout from Mt. Hood College, Portland Oregon