The Art of Listening
“What did you say?”

You can reduce your own use of this question by improving your listening ability.

Listening is simply the total of what you hear, understand, and remember.

Listening is an activity that is essential to good verbal communications. As an adult, ½ of your communication time is spent listening. The average college student spends 45% of his time listening but forgets most of what was heard in 1 to 2 weeks. 25% or less can be remembered. You can perform better if you listen better.

Benefits of good listening:
- You can improve your speaking ability. You can add to your vocabulary and knowledge by listening
- Listening is faster and more efficient than reading so it can save time.
- A good listener is an asset to a business and usually brings financial rewards.

Two different kinds of listening:
Serious—used in business, political, and professional situations.
  a. Critical listening—requires interpretations and judgments
  b. Discriminate listening—requires understanding and remembering

Social—used in every day conversation and entertainment
  a. Appreciative—giving attention to something you enjoy
  b. Conversational—discussions with acquaintances and business associates

Misconceptions about listening:
1. A poor listener lacks intelligence.
   Not necessarily so but the inability to listen may make one appear unintelligent.

2. The ability to listen is closely associated with the ability to hear.
   If a hearing loss is suspected, that possibility can be checked out. More often however, the person simply isn’t paying attention.

3. Listening can’t be improved.
   With effort, most people can improve this skill.

4. Learning to read well will automatically teach a person to listen well.
   Reading is done alone; listening is a social activity. The reader sets his or her own pace; the listener must adjust to the speaker’s rate of speech.
Common obstacles to effective listening
- Leaping to the conclusion that a subject is dull or you know everything about it
- Tending to dismiss what the speaker says because of the speaker’s delivery or appearance.
- Allowing distractions—room temperature, lighting, noises
- Reacting emotionally to what a speaker says
- Listening only to the facts, not overall understanding
- Allowing your mind to wander if speaker talks slowly

Techniques for overcoming obstacles
- Concentrate—be mentally ready.
- Use proper listening posture
- Involve yourself personally in what is being said
- Concentrate on the message, not presentation
- Eliminate distractions if possible or do your best to ignore them
- Adopt a calm, flexible approach to listening; control your reactions
- Concentrate on overall concepts; don’t get bogged down in facts
- Listen actively; don’t be lazy; it takes effort to listen
- Use extra time to improve your listening ability—review what has been said and analyze it.

Concentration is the key to effective listening!