Graham D. Bodie

LISTENING

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**Introduction**

Listening represents “a kind of human behavior that almost everyone thinks important” (106Weaver, 1972, p. 24). Abilities to comprehend, understand, and reflect spoken language are universally recognised to help foster professional success and personal happiness alike. Listening is important to parenting (44Duncan , Coatsworth, & Greenberg, 2009), marriage (84Pasupathi, Carstensen, Levenson, & Gottman, 1999), salesperson performance (35Castleberry & Shepherd, 1993), customer satisfaction (40de Ruyter & Wetzels, 2000), and healthcare provision (101Watanuki, Tracy, & Lindquist, 2006); and the list could go on. Quality listening can enhance others’ ability to cope with (16Bodie, Vickery, Cannava, & Jones, 2015) and remember events (85Pasupathi, Stallworth, & Murdoch, 1998); and those who are able to display quality listening on a consistent basis (i.e. competent listeners) are more liked, rated as more attractive (3Argyle & Cook, 1976), and garner more trust (79Mechanic & Meyer, 2000) than those less proficient. Good listening has additionally been linked to academic motivation and achievement (91Schrodt , Wheeless, & Ptacek, 2000) and a higher likelihood of upward mobility in the workplace (94Sypher, Bostrom, & Seibert, 1989). Adding to the importance of listening, research finds that natural decrements in the ability to process speech can negatively impact individual and relational health and well-being (99Villaume, Brown, & Darling, 1994).

Despite these recognitions, efforts to teach (66Janusik, 2010) and research (12Bodie, 2011b) listening have paled in comparison to the teaching and researching of speech. These imbalances were acknowledged by Bostrom (242006) who wrote the prior version of this chapter for this book’s third edition. The situation seems to have changed very little in the intervening decade. One potential reason for this inconsistency is found in that selfsame chapter: The focus of past research efforts has been on a narrow slice of contexts relevant for understanding listening competency. Any history of the study of listening will show a primary focus on studying how people, usually students in a classroom or second-language setting, process aural information (9Beard & Bodie, 2014; 25Bostrom, 2011; 116Wolvin, Halone, & Coakley, 1999). As I will show in a subsequent section, comprehension is but one goal of listeners who also aim to learn, connect, relate, support others, find enjoyment, release tension, critically evaluate evidence, and achieve numerous practical aims. On a more fundamental level, several scholars have documented the tendency, at least in Western cultures, to laud speaking and treat listening as an afterthought (C. 54Glenn & Ratcliffe, 2011; 74Lipari, 2012). I hope this chapter adds to existing evidence that skilled listening is something worth fostering.

In addition to being essential, also incontrovertible is that listening skills can be taught (63Jalongo, 2010; 64Janusik, 2002, 662010). Thus it likely comes as no surprise that numerous taxonmies have been developed to delineate the skills necessary for listening competence (51Fontana, Cohen, & Wolvin, 2015). What most of these lists have in common is a focus on not only the cognitive facets of listening (the primary focus of past research) but also its affective and behavioral components (which are much less researched; 68Keaton & Bodie, 2013). Indeed, listening is simultaneously a cognitive, affective, and behavioral phenomenon, something that occurs eternally but also something that is judged as competent (or incompetent) based on overt behavioral responses in specified contexts (109Witkin, 1990). Below, I forward a definition of listening that includes these three components (the “ABCs of listening”) and allows me to cover, in separate sections, distinct skill sets that, while not exclusive to listening, contribute to a holistic framework of listening competence.

**Defining listening: As easy as “ABC”**

In common parlance, listening and hearing are often used interchangeably. For example, asking, *Did you hear me?* or, *Were you listening?* will not change the recipient’s reaction for most intents and purposes. Parents wishing children were more obedient or teachers wishing students were more attentive are equally likely to use either question without giving much thought to differences among terms. Listening scholars are, however, quick to separate the capacity to hear from the ability to listen (e.g. 61Imhof, 2010; 73Lipari, 2010; 110Wolvin, 2009). While hearing denotes a capacity to discriminate characteristics of one’s environment through aural sense perception, listening is a relationally oriented phenomenon; it “connects and bridges” (74Lipari, 2012, p. 233). To listen thus involves skills sets that go beyond the physiological requirements to perceive sound.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Listening has been defined in hundreds of ways, with most definitions stressing how people come to understand and respond to orally delivered speech (E. 55Glenn, 1989; 117Worthington & Bodie, 2017a), a focus that can be traced to early models of language competency (e.g. 92Shrum & Glisan, 2016). Early models of language competency defined listening as a higher-order cognitive process that involves “taking in sounds” along with an active choice of the individual to select and attend to particular sounds for particular purposes (93Sticht, Beck, Hauke, Kleiman, & James, 1974, p. 21).[[2]](#endnote-2) As a result, most models of listening set hearing as the first step in a complex set of processes including attention, selection, comprehension, understanding, and responding.

As an example, take Brownell’s (312013) HURIER model of listening, presented as 8.1Figure 8.1. Similar to other holistic models, the HURIER model presents hearing as an innate, reactive, and passive process, something that operates as a “mechanical or automatic outcome of the operation of the auditory anatomical structure” (93Sticht *et al*., 1974, p. 21). Hearing does involve a complex set of sensory and brain processes that allow humans to detect and use sounds (39Davis, 1970), and these are non-trivial to be sure. Nevertheless, most models assume that hearing is not under conscious control. Whether sleeping or awake, humans are constantly processing sound; that is, vibrations pass through our ears and are processed in our brains continuously (1Antony, Gobel, O’Hare, Reber, & Paller, 2012). Not all of these sounds, however, are attended to consciously. Most sounds we hear are not “listened to” cognitively, that is, in the language of the HURIER model, understood, remembered, interpreted, evaluated, and responded to.

Over the past several decades, scholars have broadened our understanding of listening by defining it not only as a set of complex cognitive processes, but also a complex set of affective and behavioral processes (57Halone, Cunconan, Coakley, & Wolvin, 1998). Affective components of listening include how individuals think about listening and their motivation and enjoyment of the activity. Individuals’ views about listening and their (often idiosyncratic) barriers to attending to others can have profound effects on comprehension and understanding as well as consequences for personal, professional, and relational success. Listening behaviors are actions such as eye contact and asking questions that serve to signal attention and interest to others. The responses that listeners enact while engaged with another are the only signals that listening is taking (or has taken) place. Finally, cognitive elements of listening are those internal processes that operate to enable individuals to attend to, comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and make sense of spoken language. The notion that listening is an information processing activity consisting of a stable set of practices that can be trained and improved is the most popular way to conceptualise the term and one that has framed all listening research at least since the early 1940s. As such, I will begin my extended discussion of our multidimensional definition of listening with its cognitive components.

**Cognitive components of listening**

The study cited by most as the catalyst for contemporary listening research was published in 1948 by Ralph Nichols. In that study, Nichols played six 10-minute audio-recorded lectures to a sample of undergraduate students who answered 10 multiple-choice questions after each. Nichols designed the test items to assess the amount of material from the lectures that students could recall without the assistance of note-taking. Student participants recalled an average of 68% of the lecture material with higher scores related to both individual (e.g. intelligence) and situational (e.g. listener fatigue) factors. Subsequent interviews with instructors revealed that students scoring in the upper tertile of the test, compared to those scoring in the bottom tertile, were “more attentive during classroom activities and more conscientious in their … work habits” (81Nichols, 1948, p. 160). Nichols spent the remainder of his career motivating serious scholarly attention to factors likely to discriminate among good and poor listeners and to instructional efforts aimed at improving student ability to comprehend aural input.

Issues related to retention and recall remained a strong component of listening research for many years. Nichols’s research suggested that listening (as measured by recall) was associated with individual intelligence, vocabulary size, and one’s ability to identify organisational elements of a message. Definitions forwarded in the 1950s and 1960s proposed listening ability as a separate, unitary skill and reduced listening to an activity of information acquisition (22Bostrom, 1990). Kelly’s (691965, 701967) research suggested otherwise, however. His discovery that early listening measures were more highly correlated with tests of intelligence than with each other led listening scholars to reevaluate listening and its facets in terms of a complex, multifaceted process.

The measures of listening comprehension Kelly used in his research were derived from existing measures of reading comprehension and focused exclusively on memory for facts (41Devine, 1978). Although most subsequent work cited Kelly, research conducted prior to his suggested that processing speech was a distinct language ability (for review see 34Caffrey, 1955). In addition, several large-scale factor analytic studies published around the time of Kelly’s work proposed “a constellation of interrelated listening abilities” (76Lundsteen, 1966, p. 311). By the late 1960s, listening scholars began to define listening as a set of cognitive processes, some of which are related to other language facilities like reading, some of which are related to mental acuity and intelligence, and some of which are unique to aural processing (see 106Weaver, 1972, pp. 9‒10). These early models were used as justification to separate listening into multiple cognitive components.

A primary cognitive component that entered into listening research around the time of Kelly was memory. The relations between listening and memory were most extensively theorised by 26Bostrom and Waldhart (1980), who suggested that the separation of short- and long-term memory could be usefully applied to the development of measures of listening comprehension.[[3]](#endnote-3) Their Kentucky Comprehensive Listening Test (KCLT), which is now out of production, was designed to measure five components of listening comprehension: (1) short-term listening, (2) listening with rehearsal, (3) interpretive listening, (4) lecture listening, and (5) short-term listening with distractions (27Bostrom & Waldhart, 1983). By incorporating memory models into a conceptualisation of listening, Bostrom and his colleagues were able to tease apart relations among certain types of listening and particular individual predispositions. The relation between listening and memory (and thus, recall), however, remains unclear (22Bostrom, 1990,23 1996, 252011; 96Thomas & Levine, 1994, 971996).

By separating listening into its constituent parts (e.g. hearing, understanding, remembering), researchers claimed an ability to develop more valid tests that could be shown unique, but complementary to, tests of other language abilities. Test development efforts defined listening research during the 1970s and 1980s, and multidimensional tests of comprehension proliferated. The development of many of these tests was largely a response to the perceived failings of those that had come before. The most popular target of criticism was the Brown-Carlsen Listening Test (29Brown & Carlsen, 1955) which was designed as a comprehensive test and claimed to measure recall of items, recognition of word meanings, following instructions, lecture comprehension, and inference making. Each multidimensional test developed during the 1970s and 80s held a similar assumption to prior tests: there exists some identifiable set of skills that can be taught in order for a person to become a good listener. Of course, agreement about which skills to include was far from universal. For instance, while the KCLT reflected the relationship between listening and memory, the Watson-Barker Listening Test (WBLT; 102Watson & Barker, 1983) focused on interpersonal listening abilities necessary within academic settings (e.g. following directions). Research using these tests was primarily concerned with issues of validity with particular attention paid to whether the tests factored appropriately. Unfortunately, early attempts to provide validity evidence failed (e.g. 2Applegate & Campbell, 1985; 19Bodie *et al*., 2011; 50Fitch-Hauser & Hughes, 1987; 100Villaume & Weaver, 1996).

**Affective components of listening**

In addition to outlining several cognitive processes involved in listening, models (like the HURIER) also feature myriad *listening filters*. Common among recommendations for how to be a “good listener” include recognising biases and learning to work within one’s own and others’ attitudes and values. A focus on individual predispositions and their influence on how people interpret and process aural information was implicit in the work of Nichols but was not formally included in cognitive models of listening until Carl Weaver published *Human Listening: Process and Behavior*. In his book, 106Weaver (1972) argued that a listener’s “attitudes” should be incorporated as part of a “selective perception” model of listening. For the first time, a listener’s willingness to or attitude toward listening was identified as a separate component of the listening process (see also 4Barker, 1971). In other words, individual choice is a key element of listening ‒ we choose to listen (or to avoid it).

Indeed, most holistic models of listening (including the HURIER) consider some form of “selective attention” a necessary first step to move from hearing to listening (see also 61Imhof, 2010). In their systems model of the listening process, 62Imhof and Janusik (2006) introduced the notion of listening presage, which includes various individual and contextual factors that contribute to how people select among relevant listening goals. How and why individuals come to the conclusions they do as they listen has additionally been studied under the auspices of message interpretation (46Edwards, 2011), relational framing (42Dillard, Solomon, & Palmer, 1999), and other research programs like constructivism (33Burleson, 2011) and schema theory (47Edwards & McDonald, 1993). Each line of research has contributed to our understanding that comprehension of aural information is more complex than simply remembering uttered speech. Research in psychology seems to confirm that memory is not as simple as repeating what is seen or heard and that people have “false memories” even with short lists of words or phrases (75Loftus & Palmer, 1974). Extrapolating to interactive contexts, individuals often come away from the same oral event with different information or at least different interpretations and evaluations of that information (45Edwards, 1998).

One way to make sense of differences in comprehension is to focus on possible trait-like personality factors that may affect individual motivation to listen in particular ways. Scholars have investigated how differences in memory (28Bostrom & Waldhart, 1988; 65Janusik, 2005), schema formation (48Fitch-Hauser, 1984, 491990), anxiety (91Schrodt et al., 2000; 108Wheeless Preiss, & Gayle, 1997), and individual preferences for (20Bodie Worthington, & Gearhart, 2013) and conceptualisations of (62Imhof & Janusik, 2006) listening potentially affect how listeners enact their role. Other examples of research into individual differences include studies between various listening concepts and empathic tendencies (43Drollinger Comer, & Warrington, 2006), noise sensitivity (120Worthington Keaton, Imhof, & Valikoski, 2015), and related social skills (52Gearhart & Bodie, 2011).

In general, affective components of listening include any variable that influences an individual’s motivation to listen (113Wolvin & Coakley, 1994). The inclusion of a positive attitude toward listening in models of listening competence mirrored the development of more general models of communication competence, which progressed from defining competence as not only knowing about but also being willing to perform at one’s knowledge level (78McCroskey, 1982). Of course, it is ultimately the performance itself that is judged to be competent or not.

**Behavioral components of listening**

While placing an emphasis on a listener’s motivation and willingness to listen in particular ways, Weaver’s book set aside the listening response as a viable research trajectory. It was not until the mid-1980s and the push to develop “speaking and listening competencies” in US high schools and universities that listening scholars began to focus on the performative aspects of listening (i.e. overt behaviors). Most scholars writing in the 1970s and early 1980s considered the response phase to begin a new process, one that was more speaking-focused in nature (88Ridge, 1993). Models of listening competency that stressed overt behaviors were, however, natural outgrowths of previous research emphasising outcomes of retention and recall. For instance, in Nichols’s study reviewed above, the observations made by educators to classify students into upper and lower tertiles were based solely on outward signs of attention and engagement within the classroom setting (i.e. listening behaviors). Even so, a behavioral view of listening was not mainstreamed until the movement toward assessment and measurement was tied to federal funding initiatives (see 9Beard & Bodie, 2014).

Fundamental to the “listening as competent behavior” perspective is “the view that an identifiable set of skills, attitudes, and abilities can be formulated and taught to improve individual performance” (21Bodie, Worthington, Imhof, & Cooper, 2008, p. 107). Indeed, the phrase “listening behaviors” was used until the 1980s to describe internal actions of listeners as they processed information, and the term “response” was reserved for internal actions such as transferring information into long-term memory (see 4Barker, 1971; 106Weaver, 1972). What the research between the latter part of the 1980s and throughout the 1990s accomplished was to shift the focus from covert mental processes to overt behavioral ones. Two claims are central in this shift: (1) that our behavioral choices are moderated by our relationships and (2) that competency resides in the eye of the beholder. In other words, our listening competency is judged by others, and this judgment (or at least what is relevant for that judgment) varies with the context. Judgments of listening competence, like judgments of communication competence, are made on the basis of the appropriateness and effectiveness specific behaviors enacted in particular settings (Cooper & Husband, 1993; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002).

Along with a conceptual shift, the behavioral perspective inspired new measurement techniques. Competency expanded beyond multiple-choice assessments of comprehension to include multi-item scales that could be completed by listeners, their interlocutors, and their peers, co-workers, friends, and family members (118Worthington & Bodie, 2017b). Along with traditional self-report measures used to assess affective components of listening, researchers began utilising a variety of other reporting techniques including third party and critical incident techniques. Moreover, there was a growing acknowledgment that listening competency was contextual, with researchers exploring listening competency in the areas of business, education, and health. Researchers in these areas have tied listening competency (measured in multiple ways) to attentiveness, memory, and understanding, as well as employee motivation, upward mobility in the workplace, and job and class performance. At the same time, a focus on the skills needed to be judged as a competent listener meant that research was largely atheoretical in nature (116Wolvin et al., 1999). Indeed, no unified framework currently exists to organise and evaluate competency skills, and some even take issue with the need for theoretically oriented research more generally (86Purdy, 2011).

**Listening skills and the competent listener**

[T]he difference between merely receiving an oral message and listening actively is similar to the difference between scanning a textbook and reading it for comprehension and retention … In oral communication settings there must be *involved listeners* attempting to internalize and evaluate the message in order for a speaker to achieve his communication objective. (4Barker, 1971, pp. 2‒3; emphasis added)

The above quote comes from Barker’s *Listening Behavior,* one of the earliest listening textbooks. A major goal of Barker’s text was to outline what people can do to become more active participants in (versus passive recipients of) a communication exchange. Recommendations such as Barker’s were common starting points when designing multidimensional tests of listening comprehension in the 1980s and 1990s as well as attempts to develop standards for teaching listening in US schooling contexts. Furthered by federal funding initiatives in the US, several large-scale efforts were launched as well, including a series of meetings that eventually resulted in the National Communication Association’s (NCA) publication of expected outcomes for the basic communication course (see 8.1Table 8.1).

NCA’s definition of listening, “the process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and or nonverbal messages” (80Morreale et al., 1998, p. 9), provides evidence that by the late 1990s competence in listening required mastery of the ABCs of listening (that is, affective, behavioral, and cognitive skills). In the sections that follow, I discuss each facet of listening from a competency perspective.

**Cognitive listening competence**

As a reminder, cognitive facets of listening include internal processes such as attention, comprehension, interpretation, and evaluation of message content. As illustrated in the NCA list of listening skills (8.1Table 8.1), understanding speech is generally thought to consist of two related but unique tasks. NCA labels these *literal comprehension* and *critical comprehension*; in the second-language literature they are often referred to as abilities to understand a basic level of meaning and abilities to understand inferences and deduce meaning from “linguistic clues” (32Buck, 2001, p. 113). Literal comprehension begins with the ability to recognise sounds and parse those sounds into phrases, sentences, and longer strings of utterances. This, of course, requires various auditory processing capacities. Indeed, people who have some level of central auditory processing disorder (CAPD) can experience difficulties acquiring language or understanding paralinguistic cues (53Geffner, 2007). Consequently, a basic level of auditory discrimination skill is necessary to become a proficient listener; but cognitive listening competence requires more than physiological capabilities.

33Burleson (2011) offered one model of competent listening from a cognitive perspective. His model, presented as 8.2Figure 8.2, suggests that cognitive listening competency begins with hearing (the capacity to discriminate characteristics of one’s environment through aural sense perception) and moves through successive stages. Comprehensionorunderstanding what the speaker has said involves syntactic analysis. In other words, once we have parsed the sound-waves into words and sentences, we engage in a process of *inference* which drives our ability to grasp exactly what the speaker is articulating. Typical measures of comprehension include memory of facts after a lecture-based presentation, and most utilise multiple choice questions scored as right or wrong (103Watson & Barker, 1984). So, comprehension is completed when the listener knows what was said or expressed without necessarily knowing what the speaker means.

To understand what a speaker *means*, the listener goes through the third process, the process ofinterpretation. 46Edwards (2011) defined the interpretation of messages as listeners making “sense of messages by choosing from the available meanings;” she gave the following examples to illustrate (p. 47):

A student in a public speaking class gives a bad speech and asks a classmate how she did. The classmate replies, “It was interesting.” A husband trips on a ladder and his wife says, “You need to be more careful.” In these examples, recipients must make sense of the … messages enacted by another; that is, they need to find meanings for the words … The public speaking student, for example, may believe the classmate is genuinely interested in her topic. Alternatively, the student may recognize that her speech was deficient and apprehend the comment as a gentle substitute for outright criticism. The wife’s comment may signal caring and concern for her husband’s safety, or it may be perceived as an attempt to dominate.

So, when we grasp the meaning of a person’s message, we understand both the conventional meanings (the content level of meaning) and the meaning specific to the situation and relationship (the relational level of meaning) (105Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). That is, we understand not only the words used because we are part of a larger culture who has agreed to use those words in particular ways, but we also understand that by using these words (and not others) that our conversational partner is trying to communicate something specific to us.

These two examples also highlight the fourth process, act recognition or understanding what the speaker is doing (pragmatic analysis). When we communicate we are not only sending a bunch of sound waves to be parsed into words and interpreted, we are performing certain actions (121Yule, 1996). When we produce messages, we are performing actions like comforting, persuading, directing, or informing. When the listener understands the performance of certain words and phrases they have understood or recognised the act.

The final process, understanding, refers to grasping what our conversational partner wants to accomplish. When we infer the goals underlying our partner’s behavior, we are engaging in this process (83Palomares, 2008). So, for instance, when we get that our friend is trying to gauge our availability to help him move after graduation by asking “So, what are you doing on Saturday?,” we have fully engaged in the cognitive process of listening by understanding.

To illustrate these processes in action, suppose your boss says, “Hey, can you take a walk with me?” Let’s also assume that you are in a position to have the sound-waves carrying this question register with your eardrums and, thus, initiate in you a call to action. When they do, you will grasp the words that your boss is using ‒ you know the conventional use of the term *walk* and you know what walking means (at least denotatively). You also know the relationship implicated by your boss asking this question – that your boss is in a hierarchically more powerful position than you and can ask you this question because of that position (relational level of meaning). You also understand your boss’s intention – by speaking these words, your boss is, in effect, inviting you to accompany her to have a private conversation; she is not literally asking you about your ability to put one foot in front of the other (act recognition). And you probably have an adequate understanding of your boss’s motives. For example, you know that your boss likes to discuss delicate manners in private (understanding). So, while the question is actually a yes-no question – that is, the content of the question is literally asking about your physical ability to walk – your knowledge of your boss, the workplace, and how the phrase is typically used help you know to say “Sure,” then stand up and start moving.

But why is this important? 33Burleson (2011) noted that misunderstanding can come from a variety of sources, each of which is a component of his model of listening:

All of the actions performed by a source through a message must be interpreted by the listener, and each represents a potential source of misunderstanding; a listener may not understand what was said (confusion about words and/or sentences), what was meant (confusion about reference and/or predication), what was done (confusion about the speaker’s illocutionary act), what the speaker wanted to achieve (confusion about the intended outcome), or the speaker’s underlying motivation for these interrelated actions. (p. 31)

As we listen, the chances of us making a mistake are fairly good. It is up to us to analyse our listening to ensure that we are not engaging in activities that will inhibit our hearing, comprehension, interpretation, act recognition, or understanding.

**Affective listening competence**

Affective listening competence was defined by 113Wolvin and Coakley (1994) as an “attitudinal component – the willingness to engage as a communicating listener” (p. 151). The importance of listeners developing a “positive listening attitude” is stressed in listening instruction across primary/secondary (37Cooper, 1998) and higher education (115Wolvin & Coakley, 2000) alike. Most textbooks stress the importance of “knowing why you are listening” and being aware of listening-related goals and priorities (31Brownell, 2013; 119Worthington & Fitch-Hauser, 2012). In particular, students are taught to take responsibility as a listener, to “demonstrate willingness to listen to messages when variables such as setting, speaker, or topic may not be conducive to listening” and “attend with an open mind” (see 8.1Table 8.1). Each piece of advice taps some facet of the affective dimension of listening with the general assumption that sheer knowledge is not enough to listen well: the genuine desire to listen effectively is equally important.

In addition to being a popular component of teaching listening, affective components of listening also are popular in the academic literature. Keaton and Bodie (682013) reported that 80 out of 110 studies published in the *International Journal of Listening* (IJL) between 1987 and 2011 (nearly 75%) examined one or more facets of motivations to or tendencies toward listening. Mirroring work in the social sciences more generally, most of these studies (*n* = 67, 61%) asked participants to report on their own attitudes, motivations, or perceived tendencies; the remaining 13 studies (or 39%) asked participants to report on another person (e.g. friend, co-worker, spouse). As a result, much of what we know about listening is limited to what people report about their own listening (retrospective self-report) and how this self-knowledge aligns with (or diverges from) what other people report (retrospective other-report). Below, I provide a brief overview of four categories of affective listening components, namely internal states, beliefs about listening, motivations to listen in particular ways, and situationally influenced listening goals.

**Internal states.** This first affective category contains measures of how listeners think and feel about listening. The earliest self-report measure of a listening trait was the Receiver Apprehension Test (RAT). Originally defined as “fear of misinterpreting, inadequately processing, and/or not being able to adjust psychologically to messages sent by others” (107Wheeless, 1975, p. 263), RA has since evolved into a construct called Informational Reception Apprehension (IRA). IRA is a three-dimensional construct related to an individual’s anxiety regarding: 1) listening, 2) reading, and 3) thinking about abstract concepts (108Wheeless et al., 1997).

The listening subscale of the Information Reception Apprehension Test (IRAT) measures the degree to which a listener experiences anxiety when confronted with a listening task. Other internal listener states that have readily available operationalisations include the Affectionate Communication Index (ACI), Attributional Complexity (AC), the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), and the Rational-Experiential Inventory (REI) (for reviews of these measures, see 118Worthington & Bodie, 2017b). Each of these measures can be used to tap trait-level characteristics, and most measures also can be modified to tap state-level characteristics; for instance, the degree of listening anxiety experienced before, during, or after a particular listening event.

**Beliefs about listening.** What people believe about listening can have powerful effects on how they enact (or fail to enact) behaviors in the service of attending to others. Our beliefs about listening also likely influence how we judge others as they listen to us. When asked, participants readily list a consistent set of behaviors associated with good listening (15Bodie, St. Cyr, Pence, Rold, & Honeycutt, 2012), most of which are represented on scales that tap self-perceived listening competence. Two such scales are the Self-Perceived Listening Competence Scale (SPLCS) and the Organizational Listening Survey (OLS). These scales are intended as self-reports of how well one listens, in general; or, if instructions are modified, in a context of interest (e.g. the classroom, at work). As defined in this chapter, however, behaviors are concrete actions that are displayed in the moment, not what people think they do. These scales also can be modified to measure what other people (like a co-worker or relational partner) think about you.

Another strategy for exploring what people think about listening is to ask them to define the term, a strategy used to develop the Listening Concepts Inventory (LCI) (10Bodie, 2010; 62Imhof & Janusik, 2006). The first step in developing the LCI involved exploring the lay and scholarly literature related to listening and gathering several dozen terms considered synonymous with or closely related to listening (e.g. understanding, attention, learning).Then, college students in the US and Germany rated the degree to which each term was identical to or not at all similar to listening. Results suggested four broad ways one can think about listening: as organising information, as relationship building, as learning and integrating information, and as a critical activity. The work on the LCI is similar in many respects to work on implicit theories of relationships (71Knee, 1998), personality (72Krzystofiak, Cardy, & Newman, 1988), communication (82O’Keefe, 1988), and other facets of human life that influence how we behave in the presence of others.

**Motivation to listen.** The motivation to listen is an integral part of listening competence – in order to behave in effective and appropriate ways, the listener must not only know how to behave, but also have the motivation to behave in that way (113Wolvin & Coakley, 1994). Roberts and Vinson developed a willingness to listen (WTL) instrument based on successful past attempts to operationalise willingness to communicate (89Roberts & Vinson, 1998). Their WTL scale simply asks respondents to estimate the percentage of time they would choose to listen in 36 situations; the average score out of 100 becomes the person’s WTL score. A second WTL measure was developed by 87Richmond and Hickson (2001) to assess students’ willingness to listen to classroom presentations.

Other scales also tap listening motivation, though, much like measures of listening competence, they are often positioned as measures of dispositions or tendencies to listen in particular ways. Those include the Active-Empathic Listening Scale (AELS), the Attitude Toward Active Listening Scale (ATALS), the Conversational Sensitivity Scale (CSS), the Interaction Involvement Scale (IIS), the Talkaholic Scale (TS), and several measures of Nonverbal Immediacy (NVI). Empirical evidence awaits, but these scales show promise of tapping the motivation to be a particular type of listener (118Worthington & Bodie, 2017b). In the case of the AELS, for instance, perhaps this scale taps the degree to which a listener wants to consciously understand another individual from that individual’s perspective. Interpreting the scale in this way is supported by high associations between the AELS and measures of empathy (11Bodie, 2011a; 52 Gearhart & Bodie, 2011).

**Situationally derived listening goals.** The fourth and final affective category to which self-reports seem appropriate is the measure of situationally derived listening goals. The first conceptualisation of listening-related goals was developed by Watson, Barker, and Weaver (1041995), who proposed the construct of *listening style* as the variability in how people attend to and process information. In particular, Watson et al. identified four listening orientations ‒ people, action, content, and time ‒ that individuals habitually use, especially in novel situations (60Imhof, 2004). Problems encountered in studies utilising the LSP-16 (18Bodie & Worthington, 2010), led 20Bodie et al. (2013) to revise and frame this typology as representing four distinct “goals that listeners have when engaged in situations that call them to be a particular kind of listener” (p. 17).

Indeed, if we return to the NCA definition of listening competence, we see a recognition that listening is a goal-directed activity; that is, people make choices about how they listen. In particular, NCA recognised that listening can be directed to “comprehend information, critique and evaluate a message, show empathy for the feelings expressed by others, or appreciate a performance” (p. 9‒10). Their list seems to have been derived from the taxonomy developed by Wolvin and Coakley (1111979; 1121993, 1141996) which outlined five purposes for which people can listen.[[4]](#endnote-4) The first two, discriminative and comprehensive, build a base of skills upon which the three higher-order purposes, therapeutic, critical, and appreciative, rest. *Discriminative listening* includes those skills necessary for perceiving and noting differences between distinct audio (and visual) information. This listening goal seems to map onto what NCA labeled literal comprehension or listening for a basic level of understanding and recall. *Comprehensive listening* is listening to understand, comprehend, and retain presented information, which seems to align with NCA’s notion of critical comprehension. The next three goals (appreciative, therapeutic, critical) seem to map onto the goals for which listeners strive according to the NCA document. *Appreciative listening* is the process of listening to appreciate either what another is saying or sounds for one’s own enjoyment. *Therapeutic listening* is used to describe listening to others as they talk about stressful or otherwise negative life events. Finally, *critical listening* requires moving beyond understanding to evaluating and making judgements about a message’s veracity or consistency with other arguments. This taxonomy directed the development of the Self-Perceived Listening Competence (SPLC) scale which was included above under “beliefs about listening.” Thus, the SPLC might also be interpreted as identifying different goals that listeners might seek to accomplish in interaction.

Although theirs is not the only taxonomy, it is highly representative. While labels differ, the basic implication of taking a taxonomic approach to defining listening competence is that the skills needed for proficiency are at least somewhat unique to the purpose for which one is primed to listen. In other words, the skills needed to be a competent therapeutic listener will differ, albeit perhaps only slightly, from the skills needed to be a competent critical listener. Past approaches to measuring listening competence such as the Watson-Barker Listening Test (WBLT) or Kentucky Comprehensive Listening Test (KCLT) tap only a basic level of skill (discriminative and comprehensive listening in the language of Wolvin and Coakley’s taxonomy). Neither the WBLT nor the KCLT is well suited for providing evidence for or against whether someone is, for instance, a quality therapeutic or critical listener. To be sure, listening to someone describe a current stressor involves abilities to discriminate sounds and understand (and perhaps paraphrase) the events leading to feelings of stress; but the skills needed to listen in a therapeutic manner go beyond these basic skills.

The skills necessary for higher-order listening goals include a mix of internal processes (e.g. remembering details) and overt behaviors (e.g. ability to formulate questions and paraphrase a speaker’s message). While cognitive components of listening can be assessed with standard listening tests, listening behavior is something that individuals (or dyads or larger groups) *do* that has to be *observed* by others. As you listen to another person, you do a variety of things like nod in agreement, say “m-hm” and “yeah” to encourage continued disclosure, ask questions, and tell reciprocal stories. While listening for appreciative purposes, you might move your body to music or close your eyes and lie on your back to take in all the available soundscape; and when you listen in a critical manner, you might shout out loud “No way!” when you hear something surprising. All these are listening behaviors because they are outwardly observable by others.

**Behavioral listening competence**

Skills that qualify as behavior are normally organised under the label of response or responding in holistic models of listening (e.g. HURIER). For instance, 88Ridge (1993) listed the following as “listening skills of responding (R):

* Asking questions
* Giving appropriate feedback commensurate with purpose of speaker
* Responding in consonance with speaker/situation/mood
* Withholding preparation of response until speaker has finished
* Paraphrasing or checking back for understanding” (p. 7).

Similarly, in her HURIER model of listening, Brownell (302010) listed several verbal and nonverbal components of a skillful listening response including perception checking, avoiding “you” language, expressing feelings using non-confrontational language, appropriate eye contact, vocal pleasantness, and using gestures to add emphasis to particularly important words. For purposes of classification, I prefer the framework offered by Bavelas and her colleagues.

Using a discourse analytic strategy called microanalysis of face-to-face dialogue, Bavelas and her team have discovered two classes of listening behavior (8Bavelas, Gerwing, Healing, & Tomori, 2017). The first, *generic responding*, includes those familiar and ubiquitous utterances such as “m-hm” or actions such as head nods that can go anywhere in a narrative and usually occur in the backchannel of speech; that is, these behaviors do not signal that the listener wants an extended turn at talk. The second, *specific responding*, includes specified utterances and actions that are tied to specific points of a story. For example, in one study Bavelas’s team did a detailed analysis of a close-call story[[5]](#endnote-5) about a bedside lamp that got so hot it caught the pillow on fire while the woman was sleeping (The Sleeper Story; 6Bavelas, Coates, & Johnson, 2002). In their analysis, Bavelas and her team noticed that,

[a]t the precise moment when the speaker described the light as ‘really strong’…the addressee bit her lip. When the speaker went on to say that it was a ‘hot light,’ the addressee smiled and looked alarmed at the same time, conveying that she had begun to anticipate what the close call might be. (7Bavelas & Gerwing, 2011, p. 188)

Thus, behaviors such as biting one’s lip are called *specific* because “they would definitely not fit just anywhere. None of the addressee responses described above would have made sense if they had occurred earlier or at other points in the story” (p. 188). 8.2Table 8.2 summarises the characteristics of generic and specific responses.

Importantly, both generic and specific responding can be audible (heard) or visible (seen); the primary distinction is whether the listening response is placed at a specific point in the conversation, presumably on purpose by the listener to communicate something to the speaker (5Bavelas, Black, Chovil, Lemery, & Mullett, 1988). In his book *Using Language*, Herb 36Clark (1996) posited that listening behaviors signal attending, understanding, and identification. As part of a joint contribution to discourse, typical listening behaviors operate to signal to disclosers they are understood well enough for current purposes and that there is the building of mutual knowledge between interlocutors. Clark further claimed that contributions to discourse are achieved in two main phases, the presentation phase and the acceptance phase. As part of the acceptance phase, listeners can engage in a range of behaviors, some of which will provide more valid evidence of understanding. In particular, Clark laid out four types of positive evidence of understanding, including (1) displays (e.g. using immediacy cues, and verbal statements acknowledging emotions), (2) exemplifications (e.g. paraphrasing, using iconic gestures), (3) assertions (i.e. generic backchannel responses), and (4) presuppositions (i.e. uptaking or initiating the next turn). Displays and exemplifications offer more explicit evidence of understanding than assertions and presuppositions. In this framework, listening is a joint construal problem – the listener and the speaker are collaboratively settling on what the speaker is to be taken to mean. As related to generic and specific responding, there is implicit versus explicit uptake of a speaker’s proposition; that is, specific responses assist the joint construal process more than generic responding because specific responses are more clearly communicating understanding. As my primary area of research and teaching is what Wolvin and Coakley call therapeutic listening (what my team and I call supportive listening), I will use this context to illustrate how Clark’s model can be used to explain competence in at least one important listening context.

**Competent supportive listening.** It is important to note that I do not study formal helping – therapy, counseling, and the like. I am interested in everyday instances of support; these are common, and research from communication studies, epidemiology, social psychology, and health promotion converge to show the extensive health benefits of having a supportive set of relationships, people you can turn to in times of need (for reviews, see 77MacGeorge, Feng, & Burleson, 2011; 98Uchino, Carlisle, Birmingham, & Vaughn, 2011). Having a supportive social network has health benefits on par with smoking cessation and reducing alcohol consumption; and it is a better predictor of morbidity than obesity and lack of physical exercise combined (59Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010).

Most of the work in supportive communication does not, however, explain how social relationships convey health benefits – what is it about them? Why are some people judged as more supportive than others? In the popular press and textbook literatures, the advice is to act like a therapist: to be supportive, you should do what good therapists do. And what do good therapists do? Generically, they listen. The most popular model of therapeutic listening comes from the work of Carl 90Rogers (1955) and is colloquially known as *active listening*. In his framework, active listening refers to the enactment of visible and audible behaviors that function to demonstrate attention, understanding, responsiveness, and empathy; to encourage continued expression of thoughts and feelings; and to aid in relational maintenance (see also 15Bodie et al., 2012). In terms of visible behaviors, active listening typically is cast as nonverbal immediacy (NVI) ‒ behaviors such as head nods, eye contact, and forward body lean that reflect the degree of psychological distance between (or closeness with) others. Audibly, active listeners signal attentiveness through four primary behaviors: paraphrasing, reflecting feelings, assumption checking, and asking questions.

Recommendations for “active listening” found in textbooks and most popular press outlets are extrapolated from counseling with little direct evidence of its effectiveness in interpersonal relationships (38Cramer, 1987; 56Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998). With a few collaborators, I conducted a study to addresses whether active listening behaviors influence important outcomes of informal supportive conversations (16Bodie et al., 2015). For purposes of this chapter, I focus on results that showed audible listening behaviors as sizably more important to perceived emotional awareness and affect change than visible listening behaviors. In particular, we found that perceived emotional awareness is a function of how well a listener paraphrases and reflects feelings, suggesting that emotional awareness is primarily communicated through summary statements that show understanding of a discloser’s content and feelings. On average, the audible behaviors (paraphrasing, reflecting feelings, asking questions, check outs) were 3.31 times more important to the prediction of emotional awareness than was the set of nonverbal immediacy behaviors. For affect change, open questions, check outs, paraphrasing, eye contact, and facial expressions contributed substantively. Although the overall effect was small for any given behavior, on average, the audible behaviors were stronger predictors of affect change (2.72 times stronger on average) than were visible behaviors, mirroring results from the model predicting emotional awareness.

Interestingly, when added to the findings of two additional studies (14Bodie & Jones, 2012; 67Jones & Guerrero, 2001), these results clearly point to the superiority of audible listening cues when judging people as competent therapeutic listeners. Our research team also found evidence for an audible-over-visible pattern in the context of initial interactions (15Bodie et al., 2012). Our results seem to fall into line with Clark’s views that displays and exemplifications provide better evidence to a speaker that the listener has understood well enough for current purposes. When listeners use statements that acknowledge what the speaker has said (exemplification) and felt (display), speakers are better informed that they are understood than when listeners simply assert with generic responses.

What does this mean for people wishing to become more competent therapeutic listeners? First, listeners called on to provide emotional support have to set aside their own agenda to problem solve or otherwise “fix” the other’s dilemma, instead opting to show the speaker that he or she is understood and should continue exploring relevant thoughts and feelings. Abilities to enact behaviors such as paraphrasing and strategic questioning are of course predicated on both affective and cognitive competencies, bringing our discussion full circle. For instance, in order to paraphrase one must have a range of interpretation abilities (i.e. “literal comprehension”) as well as abilities to draw larger inferences based on common themes and habits of action (i.e. “critical comprehension”). Without the motivation to perform as an active conversational participant and the knowledge of how to perceive others’ speech, appropriate behavioral responding seems much less likely. (Further discussion of counseling behaviors can be found in Chapters 18 and 19 of this text).

**Overview**

Listening is an essential life skill. At least that is what we are told by nearly everyone we encounter – parents, guardians, friends, romantic interests, teachers, and bosses, just to name a few. Popular phrases such as “Look at me while I am talking to you!” and “Are you listening?” as well as the need to “be heard” by “a listening ear” suggest a universal recognition of the importance of listening. We are told that planes crash and governments fall due to a failure to listen to instructions or constituents. Politicians love to go on “listening tours.” Several professions are built on listening – therapists, social workers, customer service specialists, and healthcare providers come easily to mind. Even more businesses and occupations rely on listening (or at least on the perception that they are willing to listen) to survive. Pick up a self-help book on effective management, parenting, sales, or general relational well-being and you will find listening is a key contributor to putative success. Good listening is thus perhaps *the* quintessential positive interpersonal communication behavior (13Bodie, 2012).

But what does that mean, to be a good listener? That is, what are the defining features of listening, and what does someone have to do, specifically, to be judged as operating at a high level of listening competence? I hope that the first section of this chapter helped to answer the first part of this question: Listening is a multidimensional construct, consisting of several affective, behavioral, and cognitive processes (the “ABCs of listening”). As for the second part of this question, judgments of listening competence are based on how a rater sees the listener being willing to perform and actually performing their listening role. Other questions that research has sought to answer include: Are listening attributes and behaviors universal? If not, what are the boundary conditions that specify the important attributes and behaviors? Is good listening situational? Cultural? Relational? Personal? Can we really tell if someone is listening to us? If so, how? And what are the specific advantages of being a good listener, ensuring that you will have success in personal and professional life when you become one? Can good listening ever be detrimental to success? Is it always in our best interests to listen well? Do all cultures place this much emphasis on listening? What are the costs of being a good listener?

Based on my research, I currently believe that judgments of listening competency are based on the degree to which a listener is perceived as attentive, understanding, responsive, friendly, and able to sustain conversational flow (15Bodie et al., 2012). Attributes, such as intelligence, confidence, humour, and clarity are not highly related to listening competence. In addition, a range of specific behavioral indicators are associated with these five attributes and are likely universal, though their relative importance to judgments may differ across contexts; in other words, we would expect differences in degree and not kind when looking at the behaviors that signal good listening across contexts (58Hample, 2010). In particular, my own research has shown (a) eye contact is primarily associated with attentiveness, (b) smiling and laughing with friendliness, (c) verbal and physical composure with conversational flow, and (d) asking questions with understanding and responsiveness.

Although as a scientist I am always willing to suspend belief when presented with disconfirming evidence, current evidence does seem to provide solid support that people have implicit expectations or mental representations about good listening and subsequently “look for” certain kinds of behaviors that fulfill these expectations. In a sense, however, listening is a practical art, something that one can learn and improve over time, but that may never be done to the full satisfaction of all interlocutors. As a result, more research should be conducted but more importantly this research should be tested in practice and theories modified as they do (or do not) allow people to become competent listeners.

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8.1Figure 8.1 The HURIER listening model, reprinted by permission of Judi Brownell, School of Hotel Administration, College of Business, Cornell University

8.2Figure 8.2 A constructivist model of the listening process (33Burleson, 2011). Reprinted with permission from the International Listening Association, www.listen.org, and the publisher, Taylor & Francis Ltd. *Note*: Rectangles represent structures; arrows represent processes

8.1Table 8.1 List of competencies associated with listening as outlined by the National Communication Association

|  |
| --- |
| In order to be a COMPETENT LISTENER, a person must be able to listen with literal comprehension. Specifically, the competent listener should be able to exhibit the following competencies by demonstrating the abilities included under each statement. |
| A. RECOGNISE MAIN IDEAS |
| 1. Distinguish ideas fundamental to the thesis from material that supports those ideas
2. Identify transitional, organisational, and nonverbal cues that direct the listener to the main ideas
3. Identify the main ideas in structured and unstructured discourse.
 |
| B. IDENTIFY SUPPORTING DETAILS |
| 1. Identify supporting details in spoken messages
2. Distinguish between those ideas that support the main ideas and those that do not
3. Determine whether the number of supporting details adequately develops each main idea.
 |
| C. RECOGNISE EXPLICIT RELATIONSHIPS AMONG IDEAS |
| 1. Demonstrate an understanding of the types of organisational or logical relationships
2. Identify transitions that suggest relationships
3. Determine whether the asserted relationship exists.
 |
| D. RECALL BASIC IDEAS AND DETAILS. |
| 1. Determine the goal for listening
2. State the basic cognitive and affective contents, after listening.
 |
| The COMPETENT LISTENER must also listen with critical comprehension. Specifically, the competent listener should exhibit the following competencies by demonstrating the abilities included under each statement. |
| A. ATTEND WITH AN OPEN MIND  |
| 1. Demonstrate an awareness of personal, ideological, and emotional biases
2. Demonstrate awareness that each person has a unique perspective
3. Demonstrate awareness that one’s knowledge, experience, and emotions affect listening
4. Use verbal and nonverbal behaviors that demonstrate willingness to listen to messages when variables such as setting, speaker, or topic may not be conducive to listening.
 |
| B. PERCEIVE THE SPEAKER’S PURPOSE AND ORGANISATION OF IDEAS AND INFORMATION |
| 1. Identify the speaker’s purpose
2. Identify the organisation of the speaker’s ideas and information.
 |
| C. DISCRIMINATE BETWEEN STATEMENTS OF FACT AND STATEMENTS OF OPINION |
| 1. Distinguish between assertions that are verifiable and those that are not.
 |
| D. DISTINGUISH BETWEEN EMOTIONAL AND LOGICAL ARGUMENTS |
| 1. Demonstrate an understanding that arguments have both emotional and logical dimensions
2. Identify the logical characteristics of an argument
3. Identify the emotional characteristics of an argument
4. Identify whether the argument is predominantly emotional or logical.
 |
| E. DETECT BIAS AND PREJUDICE |
| 1. Identify instances of bias and prejudice in a spoken message
2. Specify how bias and prejudice may affect the impact of a spoken message.
 |
| F. RECOGNISE THE SPEAKER’S ATTITUDE. |
| 1. Identify the direction, intensity, and salience of the speaker’s attitude as reflected by the verbal messages
2. Identify the direction, intensity, and salience of the speaker’s attitude as reflected by the nonverbal messages.
 |
| G. SYNTHESISE AND EVALUATE BY DRAWING LOGICAL INFERENCES AND CONCLUSIONS |
| 1. Draw relationships between prior knowledge and the information provided by the speaker
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the nature of inference
3. Identify the types of verbal and nonverbal information
4. Draw valid inferences from the information
5. Identify the information as evidence to support views
6. Assess the acceptability of evidence
7. Identify patterns of reasoning and judge the validity of arguments
8. Analyse the information and inferences in order to draw conclusions.
 |
| H. RECALL THE IMPLICATIONS AND ARGUMENTS |
| 1. Identify the arguments used to justify the speaker’s position
2. State both the overt and implied arguments
3. Specify the implications of these arguments for the speaker, audience, and society at large.
 |
| I. RECOGNISE DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN THE SPEAKER’S VERBAL AND NONVERBAL MESSAGES |
| 1. Identify when the nonverbal signals contradict the verbal message
2. Identify when the nonverbal signals understate or exaggerate the verbal message
3. Identify when the nonverbal message is irrelevant to the verbal message.
 |
| J. EMPLOY ACTIVE LISTENING TECHNIQUES WHEN APPROPRIATE |
| 1. Identify the cognitive and affective dimensions of a message
2. Demonstrate comprehension by formulating questions that clarify or qualify the speaker’s content and affective intent
3. Demonstrate comprehension by paraphrasing the speaker’s message.
 |

8.2Table 8.2 Characteristics of generic and specific responses

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Generic responding** | **Specific responding** |
| * familiar and ubiquitous
* saying “m-hm,” “yeah,” or nodding
* generic because they are not uniquely tied to the meaning of any particular narrative or point in a narrative
 | * highly specific to particular, precise points in conversations
* would definitely not fit just anywhere in a conversation
* would not make sense if placed at other points in a conversation
 |

1. The way I have used the term “hearing” may seem to exclude the deaf or hearing impaired from being able to “listen.” Although I use hearing in this framework to focus on the reception of aurally presented information, listening also involves processing visual, olfactory, tactile, and perhaps even gustatory information (17Bodie & Wolvin, in press). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. One of the most influential models of listening was first published as part of a Research Pamphlet Series by the National Education Association (95Taylor, 1964). In this model, Taylor described listening as “the total act of receiving auditory communication” (p. 5). The emphasis on the “auditory” was clearly reflected in the three sequential stages of hearing, listening, and auding that was characteristic of the language competency literature more generally. According to Taylor, hearing referred to the reception of speech sounds; listening included operations such as attention, mental reorganisation, and auditory discrimination; and auding described the internal process where words gain meaning for the listener, elements of the message are evaluated, and general impressions are formed. The term auding has since largely faded from the literature, replaced by listening to describe a more global, holistic auditory dimension that includes several interrelated stages such as reception, perception, interpretation, and response to stimuli. What remains with such stage models, however, is a separation of hearing from listening. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. From a research standpoint, it is instructive to note that short-term recall of information was the focus of the earliest measures of listening (Gilkinson, 1944) and remained a standard in major listening measures developed from 1950 until the 1970s (29Brown & Carlsen, 1955; Dow, 1955). The more you retained, the better, more competent listener you were believed to be. The format of these early tests ‒ multiple-choice with one correct and three or more incorrect answers ‒ remains standard practice (19Bodie *et al*., 2011). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Andrew Wolvin was a member on the taskforce that helped develop the NCA document as well as instrumental throughout the 1980s and 1990s in developing standards for defining and assessing listening competency. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. A close call story is a story that has a happy ending but that is surprising or could have turned out negatively. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)