Chapter Three
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Most of us, despite our best intentions, tend to spend our conversational time waiting for the first opportunity to offer our own comments or opinions. And when things heat up, the pace of our conversation resembles a gunfight on Main Street: “You’re wrong!” “That’s crazy!” The points go to the one who can draw the fastest or who can hold his ground the longest. As one person I know recently joked, “People do not listen, they reload.”

—William Isaacs, Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together, 1999

Throughout your public speaking course, you will spend far more time listening to others than giving your own speeches. Over the course of one public speaking class, you may speak for a total of only 20 to 30 minutes, but in a class of thirty students, you’ll listen to speeches for about 10 to 14 hours! Similarly, in the workplace or as a member of a community group, you may occasionally speak for long periods, but most of your presentations will last only from 10 to 30 minutes. Most likely, you’ll spend much more of your time listening to others.

Even though most of us do more listening than speaking, the statistics on the amount of information we retain from listening to speeches are surprising. After a 10-minute oral presentation, the average person understands and retains only 50 percent of the information presented. Forty-eight hours after the presentation, those same listeners retain only 25 percent of the information.

To read more interesting facts about listening, go to the International Listening Association Web page at http://www.listen.org/pages/factoids.html.

Can you recall the last speech you heard? How much of its content do you remember? Now think of the last presentation you gave. How much of that information did you want your audience to remember? Is it inevitable that listeners lose so much information? As speakers, we definitely want our audiences to retain more than one-quarter of the information we worked so hard to present. And as listeners, most of us want to make the time we spend listening more profitable. Listening research indicates that we can improve our overall listening ability if we understand why listening to others is important, why people fail to listen well, what speakers do to complicate listening, and what specific listening skills we can cultivate. To assess your listening skills at this point in your public speaking course, complete Interactive Activity 3.1, “Assessing Your Listening,” online under Student Resources for Chapter 3 at the Invitation to Public Speaking Web site.

Why Listen to Others?

Listening to others is perhaps one of the most powerful ways in which we communicate as members of a community. When we listen to others, we confirm their humanity, presence, and worth. When we listen and confirm, we recognize, acknowledge, and express value for another person. So central is the act of listening that the philosopher Martin Buber claimed in the 1920s, “A society may be termed human in the measure to which its members confirm one another.” Note that listening is different from hearing. Hearing refers to the vibration of sound waves on our eardrums and the impulses then sent to the brain.
waves on our eardrums and the impulses that are then sent to the brain. When you listen to someone, you do more than simply receive sound waves—you contribute to a healthy society. To learn more about Buber’s thoughts on the importance of listening, go to the Martin Buber Web site at http://www.buber.de/en/.

To confirm others by listening to them is not necessarily to agree with them or even to be persuaded by them. Listening is simply the process of giving thoughtful attention to another person’s words and understanding what you hear. When you listen to others, you do not have to agree with them but you do have to give them your full attention. By listening to another’s words, you recognize those words as expressions of that person’s experiences, values, and beliefs.

If we are to participate in the public dialogue of our communities and make a space for others to do so also, we must listen. If we are to be effective public speakers and audiences, we must also understand why we sometimes fail to listen.

### Why We Sometimes Fail to Listen

Why do we immediately shut down our willingness to listen to some messages but allow others to open us up to new ideas and ways of thinking? Why do we willingly confirm some people but refuse to even consider confirming others? Similarly, why are we sometimes surprisingly good at understanding some speakers, but no matter how hard we try, we are unable to follow the ideas of others? Listening researcher Paul Nichols explains that we sometimes fail to listen because “the simple art of listening isn’t always so simple.” Rather, it is often work. The “sustained attention of careful listening—that may take heroic and unselfish restraint. To listen well we must forget ourselves” and give our focused attention to another.4

As listeners, we fail to focus our attention for four reasons: listener interference, differing listening styles, speaker interference, and an inability to get beyond...
interference
Anything that stops or hinders a listener from receiving a message.

differences. **Interference** is anything that stops or hinders a listener from receiving a message. Interference can be external to the listener (auditory or visual distractions) or internal (distracting thoughts or feelings). As you read this section, see if you recognize some of your own weaknesses as a listener or a speaker.

**Listener Interference**

Even though we occasionally hear a speaker that very few people understand, most of our listening problems stem from our own poor listening habits. Consider the following list of bad habits that many listeners fall into. Can you identify times you’ve done some of the following?

- Think you’re not interested in the subject before the speech really gets going.
- Assume you know what the speaker is going to say before it’s even said.
- Get so focused on the details that you miss the bigger point.
- Adopt a passive physical stance—slouching, reclining, making no eye contact.
- Adopt a defensive physical stance—turning away, crossing arms, making hostile eye contact.
- Pay attention to distractions—or create them yourself.
- Be so preoccupied with the messenger that you miss the message.
- Tune out difficult information.
- Tune out information you don’t agree with or argue with the speaker’s message in your own mind.
- Prepare your response while the speaker is speaking.
- Daydream or pretend you are listening when you really aren’t.

At one time or another, most of us have fallen into many of these habits. We may think we’ve heard all there is to hear on a subject, so we begin daydreaming or simply pretend to listen. We become so enamored or so frustrated with a speaker that we forget to listen to the content of a speech. We find the material too challenging or difficult to understand, so we give up listening, begin talking to the person next to us, or even open the newspaper and begin to read. We even “reload,” as this chapter’s opening quote suggests, getting ourselves ready for the fight on “Main Street.” Although we might want to blame the speaker for these lapses in listening, we really are responsible for our failure to listen when we practice these habits. At the end of this section, we will learn how to replace these bad habits with more productive ones. The International Listening Association describes additional listening habits that cause listener interference. You can find their list of “Irritating Listening Habits” at [http://www.listen.org/pages/irritating_listening_habits.html](http://www.listen.org/pages/irritating_listening_habits.html).

**Differences in Listening Styles**

Some people listen better when certain senses are stimulated. The phrases “let me try that,” “explain it to me,” and “show me” are clues to how a person listens best. Consider the following examples:

To her surprise, Rosa loved her geography course. As her professor lectured, she was able to touch and examine samples of the rocks and minerals discussed. On field trips, she always stood or walked at the front of the group, exploring the soils and formations with her hands. When she went back over her notes, she could see the particular hillside, rock, or mineral in her mind and remember its content and formation process. Even though she hadn’t really wanted to take this required course, Rosa did very well in it.
Mileah was an excellent student of languages. In her experience, nothing stuck with her more than listening to the sounds of a particular language over and over. Sure, she read the books to help her, but she learned most quickly when she heard the language spoken out loud by her instructor, on the tapes in the language labs, and on the films shown in the course. Not surprisingly, in all of her classes she discovered that no matter the subject, she learned more from the lecture or discussion than from her reading.

Stuart took an art history seminar at the local college and realized he had a knack for understanding the art of any given period. Although the instructor’s lectures were interesting, Stuart didn’t really understand what the instructor was talking about until he saw the actual slides. Even though he might see over a hundred slides of art in one lecture, he always left class with a clear understanding of the period and the artists’ work, because he could see what the professor was talking about.

If you recognized yourself in any of these scenarios, you know that people “listen” in different ways. In the first scenario, Rosa is an experiential listener. She understands best when she can touch, explore, and participate in what is being described. Rosa is the kind of person who often says “let me try that” in order to learn something. In the second example, Mileah is the “explain it to me” person. She’s an auditory listener because she needs to hear verbal explanations and descriptions to learn well. In the final example, Stuart is a visual listener, characterized by his “show me” response. Stuart is the kind of person who has to see something to understand it and how it works.

We sometimes fail to listen when we do not receive a message in the way that best matches our preferred listening style. Although we cannot control this variable, we can minimize its impact. Later in this chapter we’ll explore ways to adjust to information presented in a style not well suited to our listening preferences, and we’ll learn ways in which speakers can try to satisfy different listening styles. To read about ideas related to this discussion of listening styles, go to the “Learning Styles Explained” Web site at http://www.ldpride.net/learningstyles.MI.htm#Learning%20Styles%20Explained.

**Speaker Interference Caused by Information**

Although as speakers we might want to blame all listening troubles on our audience, we can affect our audience’s ability to listen in very direct ways. We want to create speeches that are “listenable.” A listenable speech is considerate and delivered in an oral style. That is, a listenable speech uses words meant to be heard (oral style) rather than words meant to be read (written style). Considerate speeches ease the audience’s burden of processing information. One of the ways we can construct considerate speeches is by reducing interference caused by information.

Listeners generally stop listening, or become very frustrated, when we present information that is too complicated, challenging, or basic. When we share ideas that are too complicated, audiences can have difficulty following our line of reasoning. When our ideas seriously challenge an audience’s belief systems, the audience can get caught up in the differences in values and lose sight of the point we are trying to make. When we present stories or arguments that are too basic, our audiences may simply become bored and stop listening.

In the following example, the information is both too complicated and too challenging for some audiences. The speaker’s dilemma, presented in an excerpt from Amy Tan’s *The Kitchen God’s Wife*, illustrates that although Winnie, the storyteller, decided to share her complicated and challenging history with her immediate audience, she chose not to even attempt to explain it to others:

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**experiential listener**
Listener who needs to touch, explore, and participate in what is being described.

**auditory listener**
Listener who needs to hear verbal explanations and descriptions to learn well.

**visual listener**
Listener who needs to see something to understand it and how it works.

**listenable speech**
Speech that is considerate and delivered in an oral style.

**considerate speech**
Speech that eases the audience’s burden of processing information.
For nearly forty years, I have told people Helen is my sister-in-law. But she is not. I have told people she is the wife of my brother, Kun, the one who was killed during the war. This is not the truth. But I did not say this to deceive anyone. The truth was too complicated to tell. No one would understand even if I could explain it all. In truth, he was only my half brother—not related not even by blood, just by marriage. And he did not die in the war. He died before the war, his head chopped off in Changsha for selling three bolts of cloth to the revolutionaries, bragging that he cheated them by charging them a ridiculously high price, laughing that the cloth was of poor quality. But how could I ever reveal this—that a member of my family meant to cheat his customers . . . . When I came to this new country, I thought I could finally forget about this half brother Kun.

But then Helen wanted to come from Formosa. I had to let her come. She told me I had a debt from many years before, now I had to pay her back. So I told the U.S. immigration officials in 1953 that Helen was my sister, born to one of my father's other five wives. And once she was here, I couldn’t tell our church friends that my father had five wives. How could I say that? I was the wife of a minister.

Winnie is an excellent example of a speaker who has information that is too complicated for some audiences (the immigration officials, for example) and too challenging for others (members of her church, who grew up in a culture very different from hers). She also gives us an example of a speaker who struggles with a common ethical dilemma: how to bridge cultural differences while staying as close to the truth as possible. Winnie decides to communicate only the background and cultural information her audience needs in order to understand her story. She made this decision because she did not want to overwhelm or overly challenge her listeners by sharing the entire story. Do you think she made the best choice? What would you do in her situation to make the information listenable?

Other information is difficult to listen to because it is too basic. Consider the following example: Katherine, a graduating senior, was the student speaker at her recent college graduation. Recognizing that graduation is a time of huge transition and uncertainty, but also of excitement, she decided to read passages from one of her favorite books, Dr. Seuss’s *Oh, The Places You’ll Go!* After her opening remarks to the audience and the other graduates, she began to read:

Congratulations! Today is your day. You’re off to Great Places! You’re off and away! You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose. You’re on your own. And you know what you know. And YOU are the guy who’ll decide where to go.

If she had stopped here and continued in her own words, her speech may have been a success—most people love the messages in Dr. Seuss stories, so he is an excellent author to cite in a speech. However, Katherine continued to read lengthy passages from the book. After a while, people stopped listening to her speech because the language was too basic. Her audience began to shift and shuffle, to lose interest, and to strike up small side conversations while she was speaking. Although it can be interesting and meaningful for adults, *Oh, The Places You’ll Go!* is written for children. Thus Katherine’s speech on change and the excitement of the unknown used language that was too basic for college graduates and their families.

**Speaker Interference Caused by Language**

Another way we can give listenable, considerate speeches is by reducing interference caused by language. Most communication students view language as a tool, as something we use to describe our thoughts and experiences to others. Some would say that objects exist in the world around us and that people use language
to describe those objects as they truly are. However, most now believe the way we know something is through the words we use to describe it. For example, even though a dog may sit directly in front of a group of people, one person may describe the dog as a large, clumsy, furry, lovable animal; another as an unpredictable, aggressive, frightening nuisance; and another as a hairy, smelly extra mouth to feed and clean up after. Language, it seems, can be a tool we use to shape and describe the things around us. You’ll learn more about how to use language as an effective speaking tool in Chapter 12. Here you’ll explore how to use language as a tool to encourage better listening.

Listening can fail simply because the speaker’s language is unclear. The language may be too formal or technical, too casual, too noninclusive, or too cluttered.

**Formal or technical language.** Most of us have heard the following phrases or sayings many times in our lives. Can you recognize them?

1. Scintillate, scintillate, asteroid minific.
2. Members of an avian species of identical plumage congregate.
3. Surveillance should precede saltation.
4. Pulchritude possesses a solely cutaneous profundity.
5. It is fruitless to become lachrymose over precipitately departed lacteal fluid.
6. Freedom from encrustations of grime is contiguous to rectitude.
7. Eschew the implement of correction and vitiate the scion.
8. It is fruitless to attempt to indoctrinate a superannuated canine with innovative maneuvers.
9. The temperature of aqueous content of an unremittingly ogled saucepan does not reach 212 degrees F.
10. All articles that coruscate with resplendence are not truly aurifeous.

You may not recognize these common sayings because they are expressed in very formal and technical language. In some situations, this style of language may be quite appropriate, but most audiences stop listening when the speaker’s language is more formal or technical than they can understand. These ten very formal sentences simply say:

1. Twinkle, twinkle, little star.
2. Birds of a feather flock together.
3. Look before you leap.
4. Beauty is only skin deep.
5. Don’t cry over spilled milk.
6. Cleanliness is next to godliness.
7. Spare the rod and spoil the child.
8. You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.
10. All that glitters is not gold.
Firefighters use jargon to communicate efficiently with one another. How might these firefighters describe the scene here to someone who isn’t a firefighter? What jargon do you use in your profession that you might need to explain to an audience?

Richard

I experienced a case of a speaker’s language causing interference during a speech about computer programming. The speaker was talking about how to develop a game on the computer, and he was using terminology that I just didn’t understand. It was probably a good speech, but I couldn’t figure out what he was talking about. This was frustrating for me because he had caught my attention in the beginning and he had good visual aids, but once he got into the body of the speech, he lost me. About halfway through the speech, I just gave up trying to figure him out, and to this day I still have no clue how to develop a computer game. This experience gave me insight into how I should give my speeches. Now I concentrate on using familiar words, words my audience will understand.

A specific type of language that is too technical is jargon, technical language used by a special group or for a special activity. You’ve probably used jargon if you play sports (a bogey is a type of score in golf) or are a member of a specialized group (in the military a bogey is an unidentified, possibly hostile, aircraft). You also may have used jargon in your job to identify processes or objects specific to your occupation (truck mechanics know a bogie is a type of wheel assembly used in some automotive trucks).

Jargon can be confusing because your audience may not know what a particular word means. What do you think the following sentence means?

We staged at the farmhouse about a mile away and after five days were demobed.
If you’re a wildland firefighter, you might recognize this sentence as meaning “We camped [staged] at the farmhouse about a mile from the fire, and after five days of fighting fire there, we either went home or were sent to another fire [demobed].” As you can see from this example, jargon is often too technical for most audiences. A firefighter using this jargon in a speech to his colleagues would be easily understood. But if he used this language in a speech to high school students interested in pursuing a career in fire fighting, he’d probably get a lot of confused looks. As a speaker, use jargon only if it will help your audience better understand your message.

**Casual language.** Language also can be difficult to listen to if it is too casual. We often fall into our familiar, everyday language patterns, which can be too informal for our audience. **Slang** is an informal nonstandard vocabulary, usually made up of arbitrarily changed words. A **colloquialism** is a local or regional informal dialect or expression. A **euphemism** substitutes an agreeable or inoffensive expression for one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant. When our language is too casual, audiences might not be able to follow the main ideas of the speech, or they become confused or uncomfortable. Either way, they stop listening to our message. Consider these examples:

**Slang**
- Dogg, this track is off the hook!
  (Buddy, this song is great! I love it.)
- Let me drop some science.
  (I’ll explain the facts to you; also, to “drop” or release a CD.)

**Colloquialism**
- He done flew off his chair at the news.
  (He was so surprised by the news that it seemed as though he’d fall out of his chair.)

**Euphemism**
- I’m going to go powder my nose. (I have to use the bathroom.)
- Due to changing market forces, the company will be downsizing.
  (Because the company is not making enough profit, employees will be laid off.)

In some settings, such as at a party with your friends, casual language is easily understood. However, in public speaking settings, translate casual slang, colloquialisms, and euphemisms into expressions an audience is more likely to understand. Some casual language may even be offensive to some members of an audience, causing them to stop listening or focus on the speaker’s language rather than the speaker’s ideas. Remember, as a speaker you want your audience to be able to listen to you without working too hard. When your audience is confused or offended by your language, they won’t hear the message you want to send.

**Language that is noninclusive.** Listening can break down when you use words that seem to refer to only certain groups of people, or **noninclusive language.** A common example of noninclusive language is language that seems to describe only men, not men and women both. **Gender-inclusive language** recognizes that both women and men are active participants in the world. Using gender-inclusive language is one of the simplest ways you can improve listening, yet some people criticize and resist it. They argue that the pronoun he includes both women and men, and using man to describe all people is perfectly acceptable. For others, worrying about “gender stuff” is an issue that was resolved years ago. Yet research indicates that when we use noninclusive nouns and pronouns, listeners visualize men far more often then they do women or men and women together.

**slang**
Informal nonstandard vocabulary, usually made up of arbitrarily changed words.

**colloquialism**
Local or regional informal dialect or expression.

**euphemism**
A word or phrase that substitutes an agreeable or inoffensive expression for one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant.

**gender-inclusive language**
Language recognizing that both women and men are active participants in the world.
If you doubt the narrowness of language that is not gender inclusive, consider the research. In 1973, children were asked to select photographs for textbooks titled “Urban Man” and “Man in Politics” or “Urban Life” and “Political Behavior.” The children nearly always chose pictures of men when the titles included the male nouns. When the titles were not specifically male oriented, the children chose more pictures that contained both women and men. Fifteen years later, in 1988, researchers asked first grade students to write a story about an average student. When the researchers used the word “he” to describe the assignment, only 12 percent of the students wrote a story about a female. When they used “he or she,” 42 percent of the students wrote stories about females.¹¹

In 1995, to determine whether gender bias was still an issue, researchers asked college students to fill in the blanks to sentences such as, “Before a judge can give a final ruling, ___________;” and “Before a doctor can make a final diagnosis, ___________.” What pronouns did the students choose to finish the sentences? Even though women today participate in almost all aspects of public and professional life, students chose predominantly masculine pronouns to finish the sentences.¹²

Using gender-biased language prevents listeners from hearing the main arguments and ideas of a speech. Whether we mean it or not, noninclusive language tends to reflect a noninclusive attitude. By using the “universal he,” we give the impression that we do not recognize women as competent, professional individuals or we are unaware of the research indicating that using only male pronouns serves to exclude women. Either way, listeners spend energy focusing on our use of language rather than paying attention to our arguments.

Additionally, gender-biased language can be quite ambiguous and thus confusing. When we say, “If a person wants to be treated as an adult, he must earn the respect worthy of such treatment,” is the “person” a man (only), a woman (only), or a human being of either sex?¹³ How is the listener to know for sure? What if Jane wants to be treated as an adult? Can she earn the respect worthy of such treatment? How would a listener know? It is easier to include Jane in the argument—and reduce the work for the listener—by saying, “If people want to be treated as adults, they must earn the respect worthy of such treatment.” Regardless of your own stance on the position of women in the world relative to men, avoiding noninclusive terms can help clarify ambiguous arguments or claims. It also helps listeners understand the intended message. To learn more about gender-neutral language, go to http://www.stetson.edu/departments/history/nongenderlang.html and read Carolyn Jacobson’s “Some Notes on Gender-Neutral Language.”

Another example of noninclusive language is language that does not acknowledge cultural diversity. Culturally inclusive language is language that respectfully recognizes the differences among the many cultures in our society. Although it may seem obvious that we need to consider diversity when we speak to diverse audiences, at times our language does not reflect our attention to diversity.

A common example of language that is not culturally inclusive is spotlighting, the practice of highlighting a person’s race or ethnicity (or sex, sexual orientation, physical disability, and the like) during a speech. Speakers who spotlight describe a lawyer as a Hispanic lawyer, a doctor as an Asian American doctor, and a friend as an African American friend. Spotlighting is most common among members of the dominant culture in a society, and it marks differences as being unusual. Consider the following examples:

The jury includes five men and two African American women.
The panel includes three professionals and a disabled lawyer.
The meeting is going to be chaired by a Hispanic professor and a university administrator.
He’s a talented gay artist.\textsuperscript{14}

None of these sentences refers specifically to whiteness, heterosexuality, or physical ability, because these are all characteristics of the dominant culture in the United States. Thus they are considered normal. Spotlighting identifies people thought to belong to a special, and hence an unusual, category. As a result of spotlighting, differences get marked as abnormal, slightly strange, or surprising. A speaker using culturally inclusive language would describe the people in these examples as five white men and two African American women (or as seven people), four professionals (a lawyer is professionally employed), two employees of the university (or a Hispanic professor and a white administrator), and a talented artist.

Also make sure your speech topics, source citations, and examples represent a range of cultural perspectives. Additionally, when you cite statistics, consider how culture and ethnicity have affected them. Speakers often fail to cite authorities and information from cultures other than their own. For example, we often hear that women earn approximately 76 cents to every dollar a man earns, but which women? Culturally inclusive language reveals that white women earn approximately 80 cents to every dollar a white man earns, African American women earn approximately 63 cents, and Hispanic women earn approximately 56 cents to every dollar a white man makes. Noninclusive language erases this important disparity. Culturally inclusive language recognizes these important differences.\textsuperscript{15}

Using culturally and gender-inclusive language communicates to an audience that you are aware of the diversity in our society and of the influence of culture. Your speech becomes more listenable because audiences gain a more holistic view of an issue. Your goal as a speaker is to connect with your audience and to share your ideas with them, so make listening as easy as possible. Using language that includes all members of your audience assists you in doing just that.

**Verbal clutter.** Sometimes audiences have a difficult time listening to a speaker because of verbal clutter, extra words that pad sentences and claims but don’t add meaning. Even though listeners can mentally process far more words than speakers can speak per minute (the average speaker speaks at a rate of 125 to 175 words per minute, but trained listeners can process 350 to 450 words per minute), verbal clutter impedes listening because listeners must process words that are unnecessary, redundant, and don’t help develop an idea.\textsuperscript{16}

Examples of verbal clutter are such common words and phrases as “you know,” “it’s like,” “I’m like,” “um,” “and all,” “and stuff,” “stuff like that,” and “then I go.” These small additions to a speech, although commonly used in casual conversation, distract listeners and add no useful meaning.

Similarly, descriptions loaded with adjectives and adverbs act as verbal clutter. Hard to spot sometimes, we often use this type of verbal clutter when we try to create vivid descriptions. Which of these sentences would you prefer to process during a speech?

**Cluttered:** Good, effective public speakers use carefully selected and chosen words, sentences, and phrases, correctly and accurately.

**Uncluttered:** Skilled speakers present their ideas clearly.

**Cluttered:** If nothing else, he was first and foremost, above all, a man of considerable honor and principled integrity.

**Uncluttered:** Above all, he was a man of integrity.
The uncluttered sentences are much easier on the ears. They hold our attention and focus our listening efforts. Without the clutter, audiences have a far easier time listening for our main points and ideas.

But how much clutter do you really want to eliminate? Notice the differences in the level of clutter in the next three examples:

**Cluttered:** At some point during the day, every single day of her life, no matter the weather or the distractions, she would make the long, steep trek 3 miles one way to the distant, far-off waterfall.

**Less cluttered:** At some point during the day, every day of her life, she made the 3-mile trek to the waterfall.

**Uncluttered:** Every day she hiked 3 miles to the waterfall.

Notice that some of what might be called “clutter” in one speech adds richness and detail to another, setting a particular tone or mood. Go back and reread the cluttered example. If we simply took out the words “the distant, far-off,” we might have a nice description for a commemorative speech or a speech of introduction. But in a persuasive or informative speech, the focus might be on the daily hike to a waterfall, not on the characteristics of the woman. Thus the less cluttered or uncluttered versions might make the point far more effectively.

Ask yourself two questions when you want to eliminate verbal clutter. First, do the words you use help develop your argument or make more work for the listener? You might use this question to decide on language for the speech about the woman who hiked to a waterfall. Second, how many words in your speech are redundant? Consider the examples about the “man of integrity.” If you look up “integrity” in the thesaurus, you will find “honor” listed as a synonym: both words mean the same thing in this context. Additionally, the phrases “first and foremost,” “above all,” and “if nothing else” mean the same thing. To say “considerable” in the cluttered example detracts from the direct power of the simple claim “man of integrity.” And to be “principled” is to adhere to certain standards, or to have integrity, so “principled” isn’t necessary either. To learn more about how to eliminate verbal clutter, complete Interactive Activity 3.2, “Eliminating Verbal Clutter,” online under Student Resources for Chapter 3 at the Invitation to Public Speaking Web site.

We often use language without thinking and sometimes present information that is inappropriate or too complicated, challenging, or basic. However, by paying careful attention to our words and to the ideas we want to express, we can create speeches that are listenable and considerate, speeches that audiences will want to listen to. To further explore information and language factors that may interfere with a speaker’s message, complete the InfoTrac College Edition Exercise 3.1, “Interfering with the Message,” online under Student Resources for Chapter 3.

### Speaker Interference Caused by Differences

Differences between a speaker and an audience can also cause problems with listening. Although we are all similar in many ways, none of us exactly matches our audience in appearance, mannerisms, values, or background. When we are faced with differences, we sometimes see them in terms of a hierarchy (such as seeing a person of a certain age or sex as more trustworthy or credible than another person). When we see differences in this way, we become preoccupied with questions of right and wrong and have trouble focusing on what a speaker is saying. Here
are some of the ways speakers and audiences are different and the ways those differences can prevent effective listening:

**Speech style:** Accents, tonal and rhythmic qualities, stuttering, nonnative speakers of a language, and gendered speech differences affect listening. We sometimes see these differences as strange, funny, or inappropriate and have trouble paying attention to the message.

**Background and occupation:** Differences in race, ethnicity, nationality, regional upbringing, religion, education, occupation, and economic status can affect listening. When we see these differences as right or wrong, we forget to be open to the value of other experiences and influences and often stop listening.

**Appearance:** Styles of dress, height, weight, hair, body adornment, and even a speaker’s posture affect listening. Audiences sometimes have difficulty listening because they are so focused on the speaker’s appearance that they can’t focus on the message.

**Values:** When a speaker holds values that are different from members of the audience, listening sometimes is difficult. When listeners are so convinced that certain values are “worthy” and “good” and others are “wrong” and “bad,” they rarely listen in order to understand why that position makes sense to the speaker. Instead, they listen as though they were in a gunfight, reading their responses as challenges.

How do we minimize our differences, or explain and account for them, so audiences and speakers can more easily confirm one another? We can go a long way toward that goal by defining difference as meaning simply different, as not the same but still worth listening to. Thus we can open up the possibility for listening that confirms others rather than listening that means we must agree with everything they say.

Although listeners are responsible for interference caused by differences, as speakers we also contribute to this listening problem. Here are a few ways we can minimize the impact of differences:

- Acknowledge and explain differences in speech styles or appearance. Act as an interpreter for the audience, explaining what those differences mean.
- Explain your background and how it affects your position or presentation of information. In this way you become a source of information regarding your differences not just someone unusual or unfamiliar.
- Invite others to consider your values without attempting to persuade. Assume an invitational stance that attempts to confirm the audience as well as offer your own perspective. (See Chapter 16 for more about invitational speaking.)

Using your *Invitation to Public Speaking* CD-ROM, watch the video clip of Barbara Bush’s commencement speech at Wellesley College under Speech Interactive. How does she bridge differences with her audience?
Even though differences can seem like permanent obstacles to listening, both audiences and speakers must recognize that difference is the foundation of a healthy public dialogue. Once we invite dialogue, rather than monologue, we encourage the exchange of ideas, information, perspectives, and even creative solutions to many of the dilemmas we face. Both audiences and speakers are responsible for creating this healthy dialogue, and a public speaking course is an excellent place to practice listening and speaking in ways that confirm and respect differences.

### Speech Step 3.1 / Help Your Audience Listen to Your Speech

Consider the many reasons why your audience might fail to listen to your next speech. How many of these reasons can you eliminate before you actually give the speech? How many can you eliminate or address during your speech? Identify the specific steps you will take to help your audience listen to, and retain, your message.

### How to Listen Effectively

Even though the act of listening poses many challenges, we as listeners can improve our skills and increase the amount of information we retain. In the process, we will also become better speakers. In fact, the listening strategies you’ll read about in this and the next two sections involve listening for many of the components you will incorporate later into your own speeches.

One of the most important obstacles to overcome as a listener is your own interference, or the bad habits discussed earlier in this chapter. However, if you learn to listen effectively, these bad habits are relatively easy to minimize. An **effective listener** overcomes listener interference in order to better understand a speaker’s message. To minimize your own bad listening habits and reduce interference, try the following.

#### Listen for the Speaker’s Purpose

Try to determine the speaker’s goal. Is the speaker attempting to introduce, inform, invite, persuade, or commemorate? Can you determine who or what is being introduced, and why? What information are you about to receive, and why is it important? What are you being invited to consider? What are you being persuaded to do, think, or feel?

#### Listen for the Main Ideas

As the speech unfolds, identify each of the speaker’s main points or arguments. Are there two, three, or more main points or arguments? Is each point clearly articulated, and do you see why it is a main point?

#### Listen for the Links Between the Ideas

How does the speaker connect each main point or idea? Listen to see if you can follow the development of the ideas. Can you find the relationship between and
among the claims made and their connection to the speaker’s goal? Listen for pre-
views before main ideas, transitions, connectives from one idea to the next, and
summaries at the ends of main ideas.

**Listen for Supporting Evidence and Sources**

What kind of evidence does the speaker use to support ideas? Identify the specific
kinds of evidence used by speakers, such as narratives, personal disclosure, statist-
ics, comparisons, and expert testimony (Chapter 7). Does the speaker use
enough evidence, and does it actually help the speaker make the argument?

**Listen for Consistency of Delivery and Content**

Compare the speaker’s style of delivery to the actual content of the speech. Are
the two consistent? For example, if the topic is serious, does the delivery match
that seriousness? How does the speaker use delivery to enhance the content or
build a particular kind of environment? Using your *Invitation to Public Speaking*
CD-ROM, watch the video clip of President George W. Bush’s address regarding
the U.S. response to terrorism under Speech Interactive. Pay attention to his pur-
pose for making the speech, his main ideas, the links between his ideas, his evi-
dence, and the consistency between his delivery and content.

**Write Down New Words and Ideas**

Keep paper beside you as you listen, and jot down any unfamiliar words, phrases,
or ideas. Keeping notes will help you listen for information that explains these
words, phrases, and ideas and keep you focused on the content of the speech.

**Write Down Questions**

As you listen to the speech, questions will probably come to your mind. Write
them down as they occur, and ask the speaker about them at the end of the speech
or find the answers on your own. Keeping notes about your own questions will
keep you focused on finding the answers as the speech progresses.

**Offer Nonverbal Feedback**

Rather than sitting passively or falling prey to distractions, listen by sitting in an
upright (but relaxed) posture, and engage the speaker by making eye contact (if it
is culturally appropriate). Use culturally appropriate nonverbal cues such as
smiles of encouragement and head nods that signal understanding and attention.
Taking notes is another nonverbal way of showing the speaker you are listening
and keeping your attention focused.

**Listen for the Conclusion**

Many speeches have a distinct conclusion (see Chapter 10). Listen to the speaker
to see if you can discover the moment the conclusion begins. Does the speaker
summarize the main points, tell a story to wrap up the speech, ask the audience to
participate in some action, or do something else to bring the presentation to a
close? Consider whether the content and delivery of the conclusion match the
purpose of the speech.
Which members of this audience are not listening effectively? What nonverbal cues tell you that one person is paying less attention than another? Do you recognize your listening habits in any of the members of this audience?

**Take Stock at the End of the Speech**

At the close of the speech, review in your own mind the goal, main points, evidence, and conclusion of the speech. Is there consistency among each of these? Review your notes and determine what questions you might want to ask the speaker, or find answers on your own.

**Make Adjustments for Listening Styles**

Although speakers should consider accommodating the three listening styles discussed in this chapter into their speeches, sometimes they do not and, occasionally, they cannot. As a member of the audience, making adjustments for preferred listening styles can be hard to do, but if the speaker fails to present information in a style you are comfortable with, you are not at a complete loss. In fact, most of us learn to listen to information presented in all three styles. Try the following techniques if you are having trouble paying attention to a speaker.

Experiential listeners may find it hardest to adapt to speakers who fail to accommodate tactile styles of listening. However, speakers often neglect this style because hands-on processes during speeches can be unwieldy and time consuming. If you are a tactile listener, try to listen carefully to the content of a speech so that afterward you can find a tangible example of what the speaker is discussing, or after the speech is over, ask the speaker to show you what she or he meant. Although these are not complete solutions, they may help you stay focused when you are beginning to lose concentration and falling prey to distractions.

As an auditory listener, you usually are at an advantage because speakers have to explain verbally what they mean. In fact, speakers usually rely more on verbal explanations than on presenting information that can be touched and examined or
seen visually. However, you may get lost in visual aids, especially if they aren’t explained well or when speakers hand out objects without much description. When this happens, take notes during the presentation so you can ask for a verbal explanation during the question-and-answer session or after the speech is over.

If you are a visual learner, you can adapt by creating mental images of what the speaker is saying, drawing a diagram in your notes, and writing down key words, especially those that bring concrete images to mind. Seeing the speech’s information in your head or on paper should help you listen more effectively. After the speech, you can ask the speaker if your images or notes match the intended message.

To learn more about adapting your listening style to a speaker’s approach, complete Interactive Activity 3.3, “Adapting to Your Listening Style,” online under Student Resources for Chapter 3 at the Invitation to Public Speaking Web site. To apply what you have just learned about becoming a better listener, complete InfoTrac College Edition Exercise 3.2, “Sharpening Your Listening Skills,” featured at the end of this chapter and online under Student Resources for Chapter 3. Additionally, you can find the Effective Listening Checklist online under Student Resources for Chapter 3. You can use this checklist to guide your listening behaviors next time you listen to a speech.

**Speech Step 3.2 / Assess Your Effectiveness as a Listener**

Assess your effectiveness as a listener by completing the online Effective Listening Checklist. As you listen to the next round of speeches in your class, use the checklist to guide your listening behaviors. When you use the checklist, how much more information do you recall from the speech? After the speech, how much more involved do you get in the question-and-answer or class critique session?

**How to Listen Critically**

When we listen to speeches, we want to listen not only effectively but also critically. When you listen to a speech critically, you mentally check it for accuracy, comparing what the speaker says with what you personally know and what your own research tells you. You also listen to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the reasoning and supporting materials presented in a speech. Note that listening critically is different from listening to judge or find fault with a message. Rather, critical listeners listen for the accuracy of a speech’s content and the implications of a speaker’s message. Critical listeners benefit by remaining open to new ideas, but they also listen carefully to how speakers develop those ideas into arguments. Additionally, they consider the impact of a speaker’s ideas and how they may affect immediate audiences as well as larger communities.

To help you listen to speeches critically, ask yourself the questions shown in Table 3.1, then follow the suggested guidelines. Asking these types of who, what, and how questions will help you assess a speaker’s claims and arguments before you make decisions about their value or strength.
When we listen critically, we allow for dialogue because we avoid making quick decisions about good and bad, right and wrong. Listening critically encourages us to ask questions about ideas so we are better able to respond to claims and explore issues with others.

### Table 3.1

**Guidelines for Critical Listening**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>GUIDELINE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• How fully has the speaker developed an idea? Is something left out, exaggerated, or understated? Does the speaker use sound reasoning? Are claims based on fact or opinion? (Chapters 8 and 18)</td>
<td>• Speakers must develop all major arguments fully rather than present them without explanation and development. Speakers should not exaggerate arguments or understate their importance. Major ideas should be supported by evidence in the form of examples, statistics, testimony, and the like.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What sources does the speaker rely on? Are they credible? How are they related to the speaker's topic? Will the sources benefit if facts are presented in a certain way? For example, is the tobacco industry arguing that smoking isn't harmful? (Chapter 7)</td>
<td>• Speakers must support major and supporting claims with credible sources that are as unbiased as possible. Speakers must cite sources for all new information. Sources should be cited carefully and with enough detail so the audience knows why the source is acceptable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are the claims the speaker makes realistic? What are the implications of those claims? Who is affected by them? In what way? Has the speaker acknowledged these effects, or are they left unstated? Are there other aspects of the issue the speaker should address?</td>
<td>• Speakers must make realistic and logical claims and acknowledge different perspectives. Claims of a solution or a cause-and-effect relationship must clearly show that the solution will work and the relationship exists. When speakers take a position, they must not present their position as absolute or the only one possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How does this speech fit with what I know to be true? What is new to me? Can I accept this new information? Why or why not?</td>
<td>• Some speakers will make claims that go against your personal experience. If this happens, see if you can discover why. Sometimes the answer lies in cultural differences or in a speaker's research of an issue. Try to be open to different views of the world while at the same time assessing the speaker's evidence and reasoning objectively. Before you reject a speaker's claims out of hand, engage the speaker in a civil discussion to find out why your perspective differs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What is at stake for the speaker? How invested is the speaker in the topic and the arguments being made? How will the speaker be affected if the audience disagrees?</td>
<td>• All speakers are invested in some way in their topics and arguments. However, some arguments benefit a speaker more than anyone else. Identify the speaker's motives so you can better understand why she or he is making particular claims.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When we listen critically, we allow for dialogue because we avoid making quick decisions about good and bad, right and wrong. Listening critically encourages us to ask questions about ideas so we are better able to respond to claims and explore issues with others.

### Speech Step 3.3 / Practice Listening Critically

Listen critically to the next speech you hear, asking yourself the questions listed in Table 3.1. When you listen critically, do you find you better understand the speaker's position and retain more information than when you don’t listen critically? Are you able to engage the speaker in the question-and-answer session more meaningfully? Now listen critically to your own speech before you give it in class. Ask yourself the first two questions listed in Table 3.1. Are you satisfied with the arguments you make and the sources you cite? How do you think your audience will respond to the last three questions?
How to Listen Ethically

Listening effectively encourages audiences to pay attention to the process of listening in order to reduce interference. Listening critically encourages listeners to listen for the accuracy of the reasoning in a speech. Listening ethically encourages audiences to pay attention to the ethical implications of a message. Ethics refer to the study of moral standards and how those standards affect our conduct. When we speak of ethics, we are talking about the ethical implications of a message. An ethical listener, then, considers the moral impact of a speaker’s message on one’s self and one’s community. Ethical listeners attend to the standards and principles advocated by a speaker. In order to listen ethically, listeners must suspend judgment, assess the information they hear, and, at times, respond to the speaker’s message.

Suspend Judgment

Ethical listeners suspend judgment when they are willing to enter an “opinion holding pattern” for the duration of a speech. They are willing to listen to a speaker’s message, without assigning “right” and “wrong” to it, in order to gather as much information as they can. Ethical listeners consciously avoid reacting immediately to a statement they disagree with. This allows them to hear the complete message and not jump to conclusions before the speaker is finished. And when they hear the complete message, they can contribute to the public dialogue in more informed ways.

Consider an example. Two students are listening to a speaker on their campus argue for free speech and the right of hate groups to say or print anything they want. Early on in the presentation the speaker says, “It’s our constitutional right to express ourselves; this country was founded on that principle. Two hundred plus years later, I argue we are guaranteed the right to say anything we want to anyone.”

Listener who rushes to judgment: “That’s ridiculous, how can he say that? People don’t have the right to say anything they want whenever and wherever they want. That’s harassment, and we don’t have the right to do that to anyone!”

By rushing to judgment, this listener may stop listening altogether or may focus on a response to the speaker rather than listening to more of what the speaker has to say. By doing so, she may miss the speaker’s later claim that our right to express ourselves also guarantees that we can freely criticize hate speech, a freedom not all societies enjoy.

Now consider the speaker who listens ethically, suspending judgment in order to listen to the full message:

Listener who suspends judgment: “Wow, that sounds extreme to me, but maybe he’s got a reason for making that claim. Let me see if I can understand why he makes such a strong statement.”

Even though this student disagrees with the speaker, he’s willing to put aside his disagreement until he’s heard all the speaker has to say. Thus he’ll have an easier time following the speaker’s ideas, confirming them, and responding intelligently to the speaker’s claims. Suspending judgment does not mean that we as listeners sit by passively and let speakers say whatever they wish without scrutiny. You can still question and disagree with a speaker’s message. Suspending judgment is simply a tool to help you listen more effectively and hear a speaker’s entire message.
Assess Information and Respond to the Speaker's Ideas

Ethical listening also requires that listeners assess a message (listen critically) first and then respond to the speaker's ideas. Listeners can respond during the speech or in a conversation with the speaker and other audience members after the speech is given. When ethical listeners respond to a speaker's ideas, they participate in a constructive dialogue with a speaker. Even if they do not agree with a speaker's position, ethical listeners join the public dialogue so they can better understand a position, explore differences, and share their own views. In their attempts to understand, ethical listeners recognize, acknowledge, and show value for others, even if their positions are vastly different from the speaker's.

To practice assessing and responding to a speech, use the Speech Evaluation Checklist shown in Figure 3.1 (and under Student Resources for Chapter 3 at the Invitation to Public Speaking Web site). This checklist will help you focus your attention as you listen to a speech and identify areas you'd like to explore with a speaker when the speech is over. Remember, public speaking can be viewed as an extended conversation, and ethical listening helps you participate in this conversation.

Speakers as Listeners

Although this chapter has focused extensively on how we as members of an audience can improve our listening skills, speakers are also listeners. In front of an audience, speakers do more than produce a steady stream of words. They listen to their audiences during the presentation by monitoring their expressions, posture, feedback, and level of attention. Speakers use this information to adapt to audience needs throughout the speech by slowing down or speeding up, taking more time to explain, omitting information, or adding extra examples to clarify. In Chapter 5, you'll learn more about your broader relationship to your audience. Here you'll focus on how you can listen effectively to your audience.

When you give a speech, remember that audience members bring with them many bad listening habits. What follows are some examples of problematic audiences and ways you can counter their bad habits to help them listen better.

Audiences Who Are Uninterested

Sometimes audience members appear uninterested in your speech from the start or seem to assume they already know what you will say. Address this behavior by making your introduction and first main points compelling, innovative, and attentive to your audience's particular biases. Genet began his speech by saying, “You say you already know. You say, ‘There’s nothing new here!’ You might even be thinking, ‘This will never happen to me’ and, maybe—just maybe—you’re right. But what if you’re wrong? What if you’re probably wrong? Are you willing to be the two out of three who didn’t listen?” After this introduction, he had the full attention of the class and was able to maintain their attention throughout his speech on alcohol and drug addiction. Using your Invitation to Public Speaking CD-ROM, watch the video clip of Tiffany under Speech Interactive. What does she say in her introduction to make it easy for her audience to listen to her speech?
Figure 3.1
Speech Evaluation Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker __________________________</th>
<th>Topic __________________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Introduction**

_____ Is the purpose of the speech clear? What is the purpose? ________________________________

_____ Does the speaker establish credibility?

_____ Are the topic and purpose relevant to the audience?

_____ Does the speaker preview the speech?

**Body**

_____ Are the main points clearly identified? What are the main points? __________________________

_____ Are the main points fully supported? Why or why not?

_____ Are the sources credible? Why or why not?

_____ Is the reasoning sound? Why or why not?

_____ Are other perspectives addressed?

_____ Is the speech listenable? Why or why not? (Consider language, organization, and interference.)

At what points do I suspend judgment in order to listen ethically and effectively? _________________________

**Conclusion**

_____ Does the speaker signal the end of the speech?

_____ Does the speaker summarize the main points?

**Discussion**

What questions would I like to ask the speaker? ________________________________________________

What information would I like clarified? _________________________________________________________

What would I like the speaker to talk more about? ________________________________________________

What would I like the speaker to think more about? ________________________________________________

What information do I have that I want to share with the speaker? _________________________________


These hecklers disrupted a recent speech given by President George W. Bush in praise of local volunteering efforts. How could he have adapted to these audience members during his speech to help them listen to his message more effectively?

Audiences Who Are Distracted or Disruptive

Some audience members may slouch, fail to make eye contact, daydream, and make or attend to distractions. To counter this behavior, ask questions of the entire audience or of particular members. Ask them to complete an activity related to your topic, such as making a list or jotting down what they already know about your topic. Bring particularly disruptive people into your speech verbally or by bringing them to the front of the audience for a legitimate reason (for example, to give a demonstration or to record discussion ideas on a white board). Here’s how Seth handled this situation:

Noticing that several of his audience members were reading the newspaper during his speech, Seth paused mid-sentence to catch his audience’s attention and said, “You know, I bet that whatever’s in that paper isn’t as current or relevant to our lives as my next point. Because, at this moment in time, our government is spending billions of dollars to cover up . . .,” and he continued on with his topic. At that point, he had the full, and respectful, attention of the audience.

Note that you want to be careful about singling out audience members. Make sure the speaking environment is such that you won’t embarrass those people or make the rest of the audience feel uncomfortable. Approaching this type of situation with good-natured humor can go a long way toward making your audience feel that you value them.

Audiences Who Are Distracted by the Speaker

If your audience is staring at your unusual style of clothing or is straining to understand because of differences in speech styles, take a moment to explain what the distraction means to you and why it’s there. Angelique, a student with a strong
accent, shared with her audience that she was from the Dominican Republic. She explained that her husband kept trying to correct her accent but she told him, “It’s my accent and I like it.” Sharing this story in the introduction of her speech helped reduce the focus on her accent and enabled her audience to listen to her message instead.

**Audiences Who Are Confused**

You can use a number of strategies to help audiences who appear to be confused by the information in your speech. Slow down, explain with more detail, reduce your number of main points, alter your language, or use all three listening styles to share your message. Even if you had not planned to use visual aids, use an overhead projector or board, or ask someone from the audience to demonstrate your ideas. Marilyn saw her audience looking confused, so she proceeded to outline her main points on the board and jot down key words and phrases. The audience applauded her efforts and acknowledged that her speech was much easier to follow with a visual map.

**Audiences Who Plan Their Responses Rather Than Listen**

Sometimes particular audience members appear to be planning their responses to you during your speech. Acknowledge their eagerness to participate, and recognize it as a positive sign of interest. Make a space for conversation at the close of the speech. Acknowledging someone’s interest can bring a listener into your speech and create an environment in which everyone feels they can express themselves. Hallie watched a member of her audience react with dismay to one of her claims and then fidget and sit on the edge of his seat. She acknowledged his desire to respond by saying, “I see I’ve struck a chord with some of you. If you’ll hang on to your questions and hear me out, I’d love to hear your reactions at the end of the speech.” Her resister relaxed a bit and was able to put his opposition aside enough to listen to her full arguments and reasons. The conversation at the end of the speech was lively and dynamic, and both Hallie and the audience member benefited from it.

Although in Chapter 5 you will discover other excellent ways to help your audience listen to you, you cannot do so unless you listen to your audience yourself. When you as a speaker listen to your audience, you make your message more listenable and memorable, and you make it easier for your audience to give you the attention and respect you deserve. You can find the Speaker’s Listening Checklist online under Student Resources for Chapter 3. Use this checklist to help you listen to your audience before and during your next speech.

**Chapter Summary**

We listen to others so we can confirm their ideas and enter the public dialogue in ways that are intelligent and rewarding. Although listening is one of the most important communicative acts, we sometimes fail to listen because of listener interference or differences in listening styles. Our failure to listen well is also caused by speaker interference due to information, language, or other differences in style, background, appearance, and values. However, there are many ways to improve our listening.
To listen effectively, listen for the speaker’s purpose, main ideas, and the links made between ideas. Listen for supporting evidence. Listen for consistency between the speech’s content and the speaker’s delivery style. Write down new words, ideas, and questions you have for the speaker. Provide the speaker with positive nonverbal feedback. Listen for the conclusion of the speech, and review the material you have just heard. Finally, adapt your listening during a speech so the information matches your preferred listening style.

When we listen critically, we assess the strengths and weaknesses of a speaker’s reasoning and evidence and remain open to new ideas and information. When we listen ethically, we listen for the moral implications of a message. Ethical listeners practice two listening behaviors: (1) suspending judgment and (2) assessing and responding to the speaker’s ideas.

Even though we usually think of our audience as the listeners in a speech, speakers are also listeners. When you give a speech, listen to your audience for signs of disinterest, hostility, or opposition. Also listen to make sure your style and mannerisms aren’t confusing or distracting. Finally, listen for signs that your audience is confused. Each of these signals helps you adapt your message so your speech is a listenable one.

By using the information provided in this chapter, you can improve your listening skills both as a speaker and as a member of an audience. Many of the suggestions offered in this chapter are discussed in detail in later chapters. This reflects the fact that listening plays a central role in the public dialogue, and our task as speakers is to listen carefully to others as well as ourselves.
After reading this chapter, use your CD-ROM and the Invitation to Public Speaking Web site to review the following concepts, answer the review questions, and complete the suggested activities.

**Key Concepts**

- confirming (50)
- hearing (50)
- listening (51)
- interference (52)
- experiential listener (53)
- auditory listener (53)
- visual listener (53)
- listenable speech (53)
- considerate speech (53)
- jargon (56)
- slang (57)
- colloquialism (57)
- euphemism (57)
- gender-inclusive language (57)
- culturally inclusive language (58)
- spotlighting (58)
- verbal clutter (59)
- effective listener (62)
- critical listener (65)
- ethical listener (67)

**Review Questions**

1. Identify the times you have listened to confirm others. Were you able to recognize, acknowledge, and express value for another individual? How did you do this—verbally or nonverbally? Now identify the times you listened with “guns loaded.” What are the differences between the two types of listening? Do you have a preference for one over the other? Why?

2. Monitor your listening for a day, and write down five ways your listening failed. How might you change these bad listening habits?

3. Attend a speech given by someone very different from you. Pay attention to how you manage the listening interference that comes from differences. Can you listen nonjudgmentally? Can you accommodate different speech styles, mannerisms, dress, and backgrounds? How are you able to listen even though differences may be present?

4. What listening styles best agree with you? Are you an experiential listener, an auditory listener, or a visual listener? If you can, compare your style with those of your classmates. Discuss with your classmates how you might adapt to the various styles of listening in your speeches.

5. A considerate speech eases an audience’s burden of processing information by reducing interference. For your next speech assignment, make a list of three ways you can reduce interference caused by information and three ways you can reduce interference caused by language. Refer to this list as you prepare your speech.

6. What kinds of jargon do you use in your everyday interactions at school, at work, or at home? Make a list of some of the jargon you use, and define each word or phrase on your list. Now think about your next speech topic and your audience. What would be the benefits or the drawbacks of using some of this jargon in your speech?

7. Watch two speeches on the videotape that accompanies this text. Assess the speakers you listen to. Which of the interferences do they tend to produce? Do they seem conscious of their interference based on information or language? How would you work to minimize these interferences? How could they have worked to minimize the interference?

8. Make a list of the ways to listen effectively described in this chapter. Bring this list to the next speech day in your class. Using this list, practice the strategies for effective listening. Compare your experiences listening in this way to other days you have listened to speeches. What differences do you notice?

9. Watch one of the speeches on the Invitation to Public Speaking CD-ROM or on the videotape that accompanies this text. As you watch the speech, assess the effectiveness of your listening by completing the Effective Listening Checklist. How effectively did you listen? In what areas could you improve? How would you have interacted with the speaker if the speech was live?

10. Review the definition of ethical listening. What is the role of ethical listening in the public dialogue? Do you believe it is your responsibility to listen ethically? Do you think you can suspend judgment and listen to assess and respond to the information? Explain your answers.

11. Describe a time when you did not listen to your audience. What was the impact of this failure? How might you have remedied this situation?

12. Keep a listening journal for a week. For each day, record at least three of your listening behaviors, three successes, and three failures. How much time do you spend listening effectively, critically, and ethically? What are the advantages of each type of listening?
The Invitation to Public Speaking Web Site

The *Invitation to Public Speaking* Web site features the review questions about the Web sites suggested on pages 50–53 and 58, the interactive activities suggested on pages 50, 60, 65, and 68, and the InfoTrac College Edition exercises suggested on pages 60 and 65. You can access this site via your CD-ROM or at http://www.wadsworth.com/product/griffin.

Web Links

3.1: Listening Factoids (50)
3.2: Martin Buber Home Page (51)
3.3: Irritating Listening Habits (52)
3.4: Learning Styles Explained (53)
3.5: Some Notes on Gender-Neutral Language (58)

Interactive Activities

3.1: Assessing Your Listening (50)
*Purpose:* To assess your listening skills at this point in your public speaking course.

3.2: Eliminating Verbal Clutter (60)
*Purpose:* To practice eliminating excess words in a speech.

3.3: Adapting to Your Listening Style (65)
*Purpose:* To learn how to maximize your learning and listening styles.

3.4: Using Dialogic Listening (68)
*Purpose:* To learn how to use dialogic listening.

InfoTrac College Edition Exercises

3.1: Interfering with the Message (60)
*Purpose:* To learn how speakers can make it difficult to listen.

3.2: Sharpening Your Listening Skills (65)
*Purpose:* To think critically about information that speakers present.
Speech Interactive on the *Invitation to Public Speaking* CD-ROM

The following video clips of speeches referenced in this chapter are included under Speech Interactive on your *Invitation to Public Speaking* CD-ROM. After you have watched the clips, click on “Critique” to answer the questions for analysis.

**Video Clip 1: Barbara Bush’s Speech at Wellesley College** (61). In her speech, how did Barbara Bush deal with the differences between her and her audience? How did she acknowledge differences in speech styles or appearances? How did she invite others to consider their values? How did she assume an invitational stance?

**Video Clip 2: President Bush’s Address to the Nation on October 7, 2001** (63). As you watch President Bush’s speech, consider his speech’s purpose and main points. How did he connect or relate main points? What evidence did he provide to support his main points? Also consider his delivery. Did it suit the content of his speech?

**Video Clip 3: Encouraging Effective Listening: Tiffany Brisco** (68). As you watch Tiffany’s speech, consider how well she helps her audience listen to her speech. In what ways is her introduction compelling, dynamic, and innovative? How do you think it encouraged her audience to continue listening to her?