

TABLE 1.2**Definitions of Listening**

- The ability to understand spoken language (Rankin, 1926).
- The process of reacting to, interpreting, and relating the spoken language in terms of past experiences and further courses of action (Barbe & Meyers, 1954).
- The aural assimilation of spoken symbols in a face-to-face speaker audience situation, with both oral and visual cues present (Brown & Carlsen, 1955).
- The selective process of attending to, hearing, understanding, and remembering aural symbols (Barker, 1971).
- The process by which spoken language is converted to meaning in the mind (Lundsteen, 1971).
- A rather definite and deliberative ability to hear information, to analyze it, to recall it at a later time, and to draw conclusions from it (Kelly, 1975).
- Three interwoven processes: (1) the physical reception of auditory stimuli, (2) the perception (symbolic classification) of the stimuli, and (3) the interpretation of the stimuli (Millar & Millar, 1976).
- The process of receiving, attending to, and assigning meaning to aural stimuli (Wolvin & Coakley, 1985).
- . . . an intellectual or active function that involves the mind, eyes, ears, and memory (Vasile & Mintz, 1986).

Models of Listening

Most of you are probably familiar with basic communication models that address the sender, receiver, message, feedback, and noise. These elements are combined with various others in a multitude of models. Based on these communication models, we have learned a great deal about constructing and sending messages. However, while you have spent much of your lives learning how to put together a message, this time is wasted if you don't also think about what happens when the other party receives it. So just as you are mindful about what goes into a message that you send, you need to be mindful of how incoming information is received and processed. To help us start down that road, we will next look at models of listening. The purpose of a **model** is to illustrate complex, abstract processes in such a way you have a clear understanding of how the process works.

Before introducing our model of listening (the WFH model), we need to look briefly at existing models. Belle Ruth Witkin reviewed a number of listening models in a 1990 article.¹⁸ She divided the models into three broad areas: speech communication models, cognitive models, and speech science models.

Speech Communication Models

Speech communication models look at listening within the context of a communication setting or as a communication-specific skill. Well-known examples of this category include models by Larry Barker and Andy Wolvin and Carolyn Coakley.¹⁹ Essentially these models go beyond traditional communication models to emphasize

the skills and processes used to listen. For example, both models highlight the role and importance of receiving information and assigning meaning to messages. Most general communication models at the time tended to ignore these aspects of communication.

The root of speech communication models can be traced to the early work of Ralph Nichols. Nichols is known as the “father of listening” because his early research had a profound effect on how scholars viewed listening. Although other scholars had studied listening, Nichols’s work motivated scholars to think of listening as a separate and identifiable aspect of communication. In a 1948 article, Nichols argued that an awakening was taking place in education about the importance of listening comprehension. He declared that (at that time) most educators felt “the process of communication is predominantly composed of four skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening.”²⁰ During this period, Nichols was mostly interested in listening as it related to the comprehension of lecture information. He constructed a test designed to tap listening comprehension of a lecture and compared the results with several standardized tests covering intelligence, social ease, and other mental and social variables. His results suggested that there are a number of **elements affecting listening comprehension**, including *cognitive factors* (e.g., intelligence, curiosity, inference-making ability, ability to concentrate), *language-related factors* (e.g., reading comprehension, recognition of correct English usage, size of the listener’s vocabulary, ability to identify main ideas), *speaker-related factors* (e.g., speaker effectiveness, audibility of the speaker, admiration for the speaker), *contextual factors* (e.g., interest in the subject, importance of the subject, room ventilation and temperature, listener’s physical fatigue), and *demographic factors* (e.g., listener sex, parental occupation, high school academic achievement).

Looking at Nichols’s research, you can see that he was still focused on the overall communication process. While he begins to isolate or separate listening from other communication elements, he still includes the effect of the speaker. Thus, Nichols’s approach still ultimately embeds listening in the sender-receiver mode.

One of the most important conclusions Nichols drew from his work was that “listening comprehension apparently involves a number of factors not operative in reading comprehension.”²¹ This statement suggested that listening was a separate receiving and information-processing skill that qualitatively differed from other communication skills studied at that time (e.g., reading, writing). So even though he focused on the communication aspect of listening, he laid important groundwork for the next generation of listening scholars to use in their development of cognitive models.

Cognitive Models

The cognitive models were developed in the field of cognitive psychology. While these models are not listening specific, they do include in-depth analyses of two essential elements of listening: attention and memory. In general, these models tend to focus on getting a receiver’s attention and getting information into memory. With the exception of a memory-based listening model introduced by Bob Bostrom and Enid Waldhart, the concept of listening isn’t considered as part of any of the specific cognitive models covered by Witkin.²² Listening scholars

Bostrom and Waldhart felt that components of memory were essential to understanding the listening process. Perhaps the most important contribution of this model is its emphasis on short- and long-term memory and the functions they play in listening. Bostrom and Waldhart did find relationships between memory and listening and concluded that listening includes short- and long-term components.²³ Other cognitive and listening research has found listening to be related to inductive reasoning, verbal comprehension, memory, reading, cognitive complexity, and receiver apprehension.²⁴

More recently Laura Janusik continued this line of research by going beyond just looking at related cognitive functions. She proposed a model of listening grounded in working memory (i.e., short-term memory). Her model addresses how we process information as well as how we store it.²⁵ Her research findings support claims that listening is a cognitive process. We discuss cognitive aspects of listening further in Chapter 3.

Speech Science Models

The third category of models that Witkin explored was speech science models, or auditory-processing models. These models seem to focus more on the physiological aspects of listening or hearing and the act of discriminating types of incoming stimulus. Through her research, Witkin identified a number of important auditory elements affecting listening, such as pitch/intonation and oral language processing.²⁶ While critics of these models suggest that they confuse the hearing process with listening (and we certainly don't want to do that), these models are important because they emphasize two critical aspects of listening: physical reception of the stimulus and the ability to discriminate among pieces of the stimulus. While knowing the physiology of listening is important, we must keep in mind that people who are profoundly deaf and those who have hearing disabilities are able to take in information and process it. This observation suggests that listening is much more than the physiological process of receiving and processing sound.

Current Listening Models

Recent models attempt to blend the three areas identified by Witkin. One of these models, Judy Brownell's **HURIER model**, includes elements of the cognitive and speech science perspectives.²⁷ The model looks at six interrelated processes:

1. **Hearing**—the accurate reception of sound. This element of the process includes focusing on the speaker, discriminating among sounds, and concentrating on the message.
2. **Understanding**—listening comprehension or understanding the message. This element involves information processing and inner speech.
3. **Remembering**—retaining and recalling information.
4. **Interpreting**—using the interaction context and knowledge of the other person to assign meaning to the message.
5. **Evaluating**—applying your own perspectives and biases to your interpretation.
6. **Responding**—appropriately responding to the message.

In the HURIER model, the above elements are situated in the context of the listening goal and the situation, making it an interpersonally based model.

Other models are more contextually based. For example, the **Integrative Listening model (ILM)**, developed by Kathy Thompson and colleagues, is based on a specific definition of listening: “the dynamic, interactive process of integrating appropriate listening attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors to achieve the selected goal(s) of a listening event.”²⁸ This model centers on four stages:

1. Preparing to listen—establishing listening goals ahead of time, analyzing the interaction context, and addressing potential listening filters
2. Applying the listening process model—using five distinct components of listening—receiving, comprehending, evaluating, interpreting, and responding—in ways that are appropriate for the specific listening setting
3. Assessing listening effectiveness—reflecting on one’s listening performance by oneself and others
4. Establishing goals for future listening—ongoing development of listening goals based on self-assessment and feedback

The authors suggest that the stages are interrelated, discrete elements that are each uniquely important to the listening process. In addition to context, the ILM also emphasizes the role of assessment by each party.

The next model was developed to study cultural differences in listening. Professors Margarete Imhof of Germany and Laura Janusik of the United States developed a **systems model** of the listening process.²⁹

Their model explores the associations among three aspects of listening: presage, process, and product. *Presage* includes the interaction of context factors and the mental and motivational aspect of the listener, while *process* includes different courses of listening action. For example, they feel that listening for information and listening for relationship building are two very different things. Finally, *product* reflects the listening outcome the listener seeks and achieves. It is important to remember that presage, process, and product interact and affect each other.

The above discussion of existing models of listening gives you a good idea of the breadth of perspectives of the listening process. The next model we cover is our own model—the Worthington Fitch-Hauser (WFH) model—and the one that we will use to present listening as a critical communication and life competency. The **Listening MATERRS model** presents our perspective of the listening process.

While we recognize that listening occurs in some type of communication context, we feel it is important to focus on what happens from the point the listener becomes aware of a stimulus. This starting point is the beginning of the conscious process of listening and acknowledges that there are many sounds “out there” that we choose to ignore. Before reading about our model, take a moment to *Think on It*.

THINK ON IT

Think back on a recent listening encounter. It can be a class lecture you found particularly interesting (or boring), a friend in distress, or a movie you were watching. Pick two of the previously described models. How would they help explain what occurred during your listening encounter? Did you find one model did a better job of explaining than the other?

THINK ON IT

Have you ever thought about how noisy our world is? To test this premise, get everyone in the room to stop talking for sixty seconds. During this time of silence, count the number of sounds you can identify.

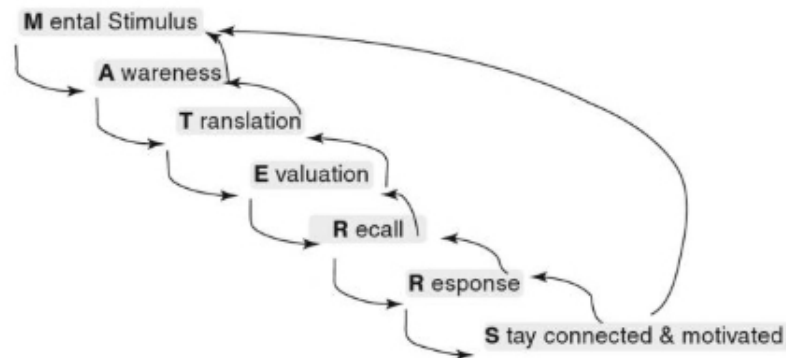


FIGURE 1.1
Elements of the Worthington Fitch-Hauser Model of Listening.

WORTHINGTON FITCH-HAUSER MODEL OF LISTENING: LISTENING MATERRS

WFH Model Elements

Mental Stimulus In many ways, listening is a sorting process. We hear a tremendous amount of material every day, but as you know, we can't listen to all of it. **Mental stimulus** occurs when you begin to actively *attend* to a physical noise or stimulus. You make a conscious decision to focus and "listen" to a particular input. Thus, you hear your name from across the room, someone raises his voice and speaks angrily, or you see a quick movement and direct your focus to that particular listening event. Thus, hearing is the physiological process, while listening



FIGURE 1.2
The Worthington Fitch-Hauser Model.

involves **intentionality** on the part of the receiver. We hear a great deal (i.e., physically receive stimulus) but attend to relatively little of it.

Awareness Once you become fully aware or intentionally listen to a sound or message, you can then say you have moved to **awareness**. Here you engage in what can best be described as a mental sorting process, which means you have begun to listen more closely to the message or sound. Your decision to actively attend to a message is affected by any number of factors. One of these factors is **motivation**. If you are motivated by the subject matter, the situation, or the individual, you will find a way to focus and pay attention. Another factor is cognitive load. **Cognitive load** is the amount of information you are mentally processing at a given point in time.³⁰ For example, if you are experiencing a particularly high cognitive load, you might not be able to listen any further. The student who is worried about an exam; the woman driving and talking on her mobile phone; and the dad with a child jumping up and down, trying to get his attention will all have a higher cognitive load than the person who is sitting quietly, focused on a presentation. The higher the cognitive load, the fewer mental resources you have available to listen. Although most of us like to think we can multitask, multitasking simply does not work well when it comes to really listening to others. Multitasking is directly related to cognitive load, the more activities you engage in, the greater your cognitive load.

Cognitive filtering can also affect your ability to listen. Cognitive filtering addresses your ability to filter out common noises such as the ones you identified when you tried the 60-second exercise in the *Think on It* box. During that brief time, you heard any number of mental stimulus inputs. However, until that moment, you were probably unaware of them largely because you had no reason, or lacked motivation, to tune in to them.

Environmental factors can also affect your ability to listen. These factors can be internal or external. For example, a loud radio, uncomfortable temperatures, hunger pangs, and the like can distract you from listening. Finally cognitive filtering includes your **personal biases**. You might stop listening to a speaker because you think you have “heard it all before,” you personally dislike him, or you think he is too young to offer insight into your conversation. Your biases can have a tremendous effect on your choice to engage in the next aspect of our model: translation.

Translation Given sufficient motivation, you move from awareness to **translation**. At this level the listener begins to recognize the basic components of the message. Here language begins to be processed, nonverbals are interpreted,

THINK ON IT

Grammy Award-winning violinist Joshua Bell, one of the world’s premier violinists, participated in a study conducted by the *Washington Post*. Would the people of Washington, D.C., stop and listen as they passed through L’Enfant Plaza, one of many subway stops in the city? Would they listen to a man who sells out concert halls and who owns and plays a \$3.5 million Stradivarius violin? Would you stop and listen? As you watch the video clips embedded in the *Washington Post*’s story, you can tell that for some people, his music did not register enough with them for their listening to move to an awareness level. These people did not appear to hear him at all. Other individuals were obviously aware of Bell’s playing. They looked over to him but continued walking. A few people stopped and put money in his violin case. Even fewer actually stopped and truly listened.

Reviewing the factors that may affect the first two levels of listening described above, what may be affecting their listening processes? Why would all the children who heard Bell play try to stop and listen, while their parents try to hurry them along?

A few individuals did stop and listen. What has to happen in terms of their listening for this to occur? Why would they stop? If you’re interested in the explanations from individuals who heard Bell play that day, you can access the full article and video clips at the *Washington Post* Web site (www.washingtonpost.com). Gene Weingarten’s article is titled “Pearls Before Breakfast.”

schemata are triggered. Three types of processing of information might occur: affective processing, rational processing, and dual processing.

Affective processing occurs when you primarily focus on the emotional elements of what you are hearing. Is the person upset? Does the message make you happy? Sad? Angry? Is it uplifting or depressing? Some contexts require that you primarily focus on affective processing. At those times you are less concerned about whether a person's message makes sense and are more interested in determining how he or she is feeling. At other times you might need to suppress your own emotions and focus on fully understanding a message—grammar, logic, clarity, coherence, and so forth. At these times you engage in **rational processing**. Rational processing occurs when you focus on the information itself and the logic of that information. In this type of processing, you analyze, fairly objectively, the validity of the message and begin to connect it with what you have stored in your own information banks. You might also evaluate the credentials of the speaker and the appropriateness of the information for the situation. When you use your rational processing as a listener, you are assessing the information according to your individual understanding of the rules of logic. In other words, what seems logical to Ben might not seem logical to Tamarah. Thus, it's important for you to remember that like all information processing, this type of reasoning is governed by individual experiences and education. Finally you can also engage in **dual processing**. At times effective listening requires you to use both affective and rational processing to translate a message.

Evaluation When you truly begin linking what you hear to what you know, you have moved to **evaluating** a message. This level involves the actual cognitive processing of the information. You use your schemata to aid in the interpretation of what you hear, to develop new mental models, and to categorize information. This level also includes value assessments. In judging the violin playing of Joshua Bell (see previous *Think on It* box), you might decide the music has a beautiful melody, too slow a beat, or just isn't your style. If you determine the information is important enough or novel enough, you are motivated to move to the next element in our model of listening: recalling.

Recall Two important things happen at this point. First, you determine what gets stored in your memory. Second, you assess whether a message requires a response. In the context of this model, memory can be divided into two primary areas: working memory and long-term memory. **Working memory** is the information that is accessible to you during a listening event. Memory researchers would call this short-term memory (a concept discussed further in Chapter 3). In essence, working memory is short-term storage where you place information while you make decisions about what you are going to do with it.³¹ For example, if you hear a professor say information is going to be covered on an exam, you will not only pay close attention, you will likely send the information to long-term memory. On the other hand, if you are engaging in a social conversation with the same professor, you will retain information just long enough to make an appropriate response; you might or might not send the information to long-term storage. **Long-term memory** is your storehouse of information. It contains all of the information you have learned in life. However, it is important to note that if you are not listening, information probably will never make it to long-term storage.