



# Five Levels Of Listening

From recognizing when you're not truly paying attention to achieving deeper connection through empathetic understanding, discover the art of listening and transform the way you communicate.





# The Five Levels of Listening

## Key Takeaways

In **TalkRx** by Dr. Neha Sangwan, the Five Levels of Listening offer a framework for deepening communication and strengthening relationships. Each level represents a different way of engaging with others—and learning to move up the spectrum can transform the way you connect.



**Level 1: Closed Listening** happens when you're physically present but mentally absent, leaving others feeling ignored or dismissed.

Closed Listening has three common causes: you're distracted, you already know what's being said, or you don't care. Recognizing when you're tuning out is the first step to improving engagement.

**Level 2: Head Listening** occurs in a conversation when your focus is on yourself – what you'll say next, how you sound, or how your own experiences compare.

Head Listening happens when you want to appear smart or impressive, feel eager to share your own experiences, or are subtly competing by trying to top the other person's story. All of these can make conversations feel transactional rather than meaningful.



**Level 3: Ears-Only Listening** is when you tune in to the spoken facts but filter out tone, subtext, and emotion.

Ears-Only Listening can be helpful in situations where precise details matter, like taking instructions from a boss or receiving medical advice. But relying on it can lead to misunderstandings when emotions are at play.

**Level 4: Heart Listening** means hearing beyond the words to pick up on the emotions underneath.

This is especially valuable in emotionally charged situations as it helps to de-escalate tension, navigate awkward moments, and resolve conflict.



**Level 5: Open Listening** is the gold standard of listening – It fosters trust, strengthens connections, and transforms conflict into meaningful dialogue.

Open Listening goes beyond words and emotions to recognize the values driving someone's perspective. By listening between the lines, you can uncover what truly matters to the speaker—whether it's loyalty, independence, fairness, or something else entirely.



# Worksheet 1

## The Five Levels of Listening – Self Reflection

**Objective:** Assess how you listen and identify ways to improve your communication skills.

When do you tend to use...

### Level 1: Closed Listening?

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### Level 2: Head Listening?

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### Level 3: Ears-Only Listening?

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### Level 4: Heart Listening?

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### Level 5: Open Listening

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Which of the above would you like to change?

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# Worksheet 2

## Closed Listening Challenge

**Objective:** Recognize when you're engaging in Closed Listening and shift toward curiosity.

### Step 1: Listening Level Tracker

For the next three conversations you have today, track your listening levels.

Conversation	Who were you speaking with?	Listening Level (1-5)	How did it feel?
<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>

**1. What patterns do you notice in how you listen?**

**2. What's one small change you can make to move toward Open Listening?**

### Step 2: Getting to Level 5

In your next deep conversation, identify the value behind the words.

Conversation	Speaker's Key Message	What Value Might Be Driving This? (Trust, Independence, Respect, etc.,)
<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>

**How did listening for values change your understanding of the conversation?**



## Step 3: Self-Awareness Check

**1. Think of a recent time when you were not really listening during a conversation.**

**2. What distracted you? (Circle all that apply)**

- ☐ Phone / Multi-Tasking
- ☐ Thinking About Something Else
- ☐ Assuming you already knew what the person was going to say
- ☐ Disinterest In The Topic
- ☐ Other:

**3. How did the speaker react? Did they notice your disengagement?**

## Step 4: The Curiosity Challenge

Next time you're in a conversation you'd usually tune out of, try this instead:

1. Ask a follow-up question
2. Repeat back something they said
3. Stay present for at least one full minute without thinking about your response

Conversation

Who Was Speaking?

What question did you ask to stay engaged?

**1. How did this small shift change the conversation?**

**2. What surprised you?**



# Worksheet 3

## Head Listening – The ‘What Should I Say Next?’ Habit

**Objective:** Recognize Head Listening patterns and practice refocusing on the speaker.

### Step 1: Recognizing Head Listening Traps

**1. Do you ever find yourself doing the following during conversations? (Check all that apply)**

- ☐ The Planner: Thinking about what you’ll say instead of truly listening
- ☐ The Hijacker: Redirecting the conversation back to yourself
- ☐ The One-Upper: Trying to out-do the other person’s story

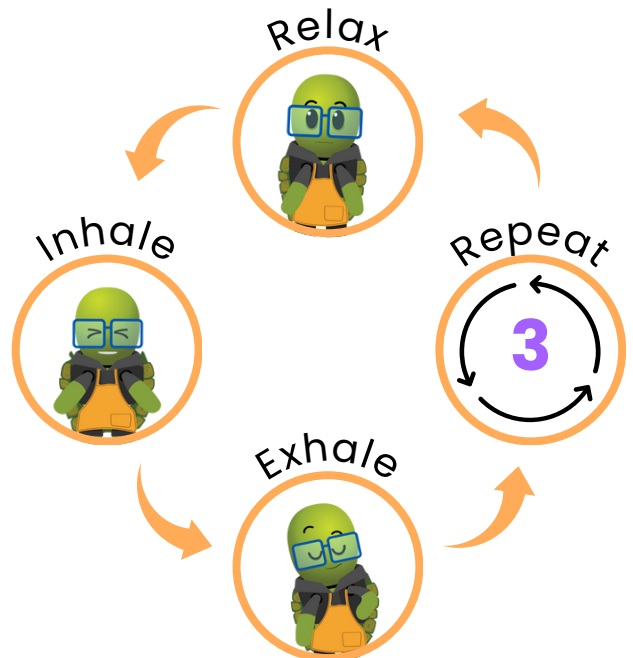
**2. How often do you do this? (Select one)**

- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Frequently

**3. What impact do you think this has on your relationships?**

### Step 2: Reset Your Listening with Soft Belly Breathing

1. Place one hand on your abdomen.
2. Let gravity pull your shoulders down.
3. Slowly and deeply inhale and feel your belly expand.
4. Exhale slowly, releasing tension.
5. Repeat three times before an important conversation.



**Try this before your next conversation and note how it affects your listening.**



# Worksheet 4

## Ears-Only Listening – The Fact Collector

**Objective:** Identify when Ears-Only Listening is useful vs. when it falls short.

### Step 1: When Do You Use Ears-Only Listening?

1. Think of a time when you only focused on words and missed the emotional cues?

2. What was the result? (Example: I understood what was said but didn't realize they were upset.)

3. How could Heart Listening have changed the situation?

### Step 2: Two Key Skills to Improve Ears-Only Listening

1. Write it down! Keep notes during important conversations.

2. Repeat and Confirm: Echo back what you heard to check understanding.

Try these techniques in a meeting today and jot down how it impacted clarity:

Conversation

Notes You Took

Did You Confirm Understanding?



# Worksheet 5

## Heart Listening – Tuning into Feelings

**Objective:** Improve emotional intelligence by practicing Heart Listening.

### Step 1: Identifying Emotional Cues

1. Think of a recent conversation where emotions played a role.

2. What emotions do you think the other person was feeling?

3. Did you acknowledge their emotions or focus only on facts?

### Step 2: The Heart Listening Challenge

**Next time someone shares something emotional with you:**

- ♡ Name the emotion you think they're expressing
  - Ex: ("You seem nervous" / "That sounds frustrating")
- ♡ Ask how they're feeling instead of assuming.
- ♡ Resist the urge to fix the problem immediately.

Conversation

Who Was Speaking?

What emotions did you acknowledge?

**How did this change the conversation?**





# Worksheet 6

## Open Listening – The Gold Standard

**Objective:** Master the art of Open Listening by focusing on values, emotions, and words.

### Step 1: What Drives Communication?

**1. Think of a time when a conversation felt meaningful and deeply connected.**

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**2. What made it different from an everyday conversation?**

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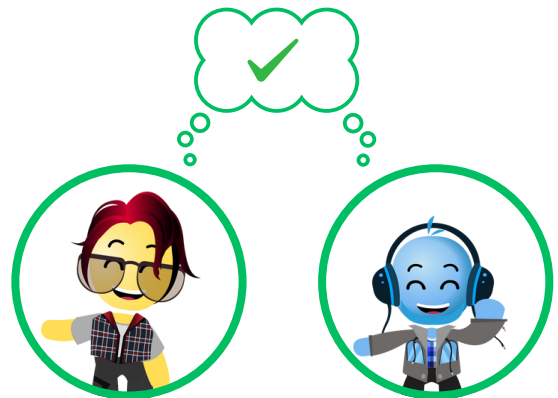
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### Step 2: Bridging Conflict & Creating Connection

Next time you anticipate conflict arising, seek to understand the deeper values by asking:

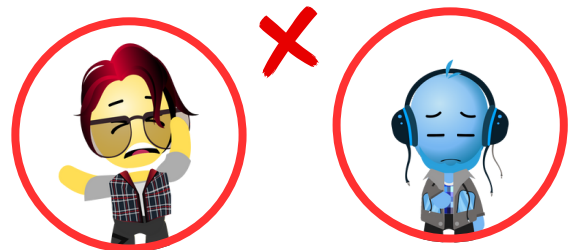
#### Say This (To Understand Deeper Values):

- It sounds like this really matters to you because...
- What's at the heart of this for you?
- I want to make sure I understand—not just what happened, but why it feels the way it does.
- What's most important to you in this situation?



#### Not That:

- Let's agree to disagree. (too early)
- I don't see why you're so upset.
- You're taking this too personally.



**1. Do you anticipate any upcoming conversations where this may be helpful?**

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