



Listening report

From the perspective of: **your self perceptions**

TEST CASE

20.11.2023

The reality of listening

Although we know that listening is an essential part of communicating, and at least as important as talking, that in itself does not make us good listeners. At times we can be very poor listeners, when we are fatigued, for instance, or preoccupied or in the grip of some strong emotion.

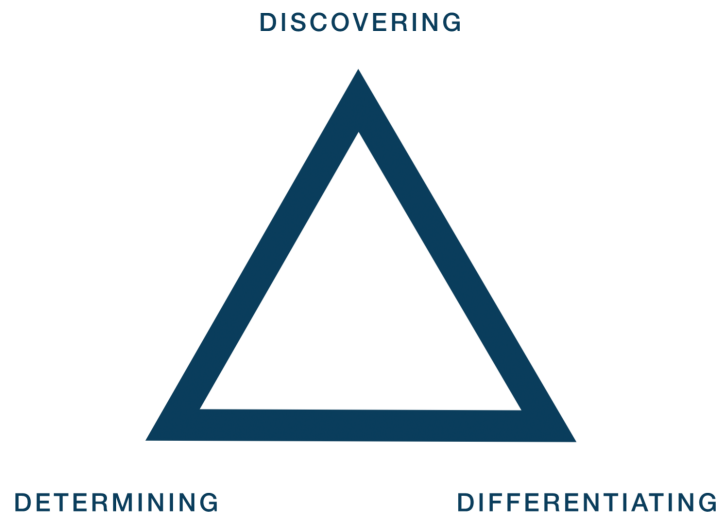
The factors that can affect the quality of our listening are many and varied, including our level of interest in the subject, whether we like the speaker or not, whether we feel safe or threatened, and more subtly by our own self-image and psychological shadow as well as the diverse array of assumptions, beliefs and unconscious biases that we happen to be carrying.

In short, it is inherently difficult to give other people our undivided attention, because there are always competing demands being made on that attention. The VoicePrint Listening questionnaire is based on this reality. It recognises that, when we listen, we are not simply passive or neutral receivers of incoming data, but are actively working with those inputs, as - or even before - they arrive. Listening is a process of interaction between the outside world and the inner. We have to remind ourselves (or be reminded) to listen actively to others precisely because some of our attention, at a less than fully conscious level, is already being diverted to our own purposes while we listen.

The VoicePrint Listening questionnaire invites you to reflect on what might be happening in your own case, while you listen. The objective of both the questionnaire, and the profile that has been derived from it, is to help you to make even more effective use of the process of listening across the many different and demanding situations in which it may be the most valuable contribution that we can make.

A map for listening

On the assumption that our attention tends to go somewhere rather than merely switch off, the VoicePrint triangle provides a map of where our attention might go. In the same way that there are three broad purposes - exploring, positioning and controlling - that can be served when we talk, so likewise there are three corresponding purposes that can be pursued when we listen - finding out, sorting out and deciding. The VoicePrint Listening model calls these activities Discovering, Differentiating and Determining.



All three of these processes are necessary and useful. At times one will be more immediately important than another, but listening involves all three, used in different combinations and sequences. Confronted by a sudden threat, we might go straight to Determining. Facing a less urgent but difficult choice, we might spend more time Differentiating before deciding. Faced with an unfamiliar or emerging situation, we might very appropriately spend longer Discovering. Different occasions, problems, challenges, opportunities, roles and people - or how we perceive them - invite different patterns of listening.

Being aware of these differences helps us to listen better.

We listen better still, if we are alert to these differences in-the-moment and aware of how our attention is being shaped by our thoughts, feelings, habits, preferences and priorities. Once we are able to reflect on these influences, we acquire choice: the ability to steer and focus our attention and to improve the quality and impact of our listening.

Your VoicePrint Listening profile is a starting point to help you to develop that in-the-moment awareness. Your profile, as presented here, is neither fixed nor definitive. It is the product of a few questions. As you reflect on the results and relate them to your lived experience across a wide range of situations, you'll discover further questions and insights of your own, you'll be able to differentiate more accurately your actual listening behaviour in different circumstances, and you'll be able to determine the most relevant and useful action steps to take to become a consistently great listener.

The only person who can choose and determine what happens inside you, as you listen, is you.

Exploring your own Listening Profile

1. How you divide your attention

VoicePrint research shows that while Discovery is the most obvious and possibly the primary function of listening, it is evidently not the only one. All of us use listening to find out, but also to distinguish and to decide. What varies from one person to another - and potentially from one context to another - is the relative emphasis given to Discovering, Differentiating and Determining.

On the basis of your response to the VoicePrint self-report Listening questionnaire, you currently tend to divide your attention as follows:

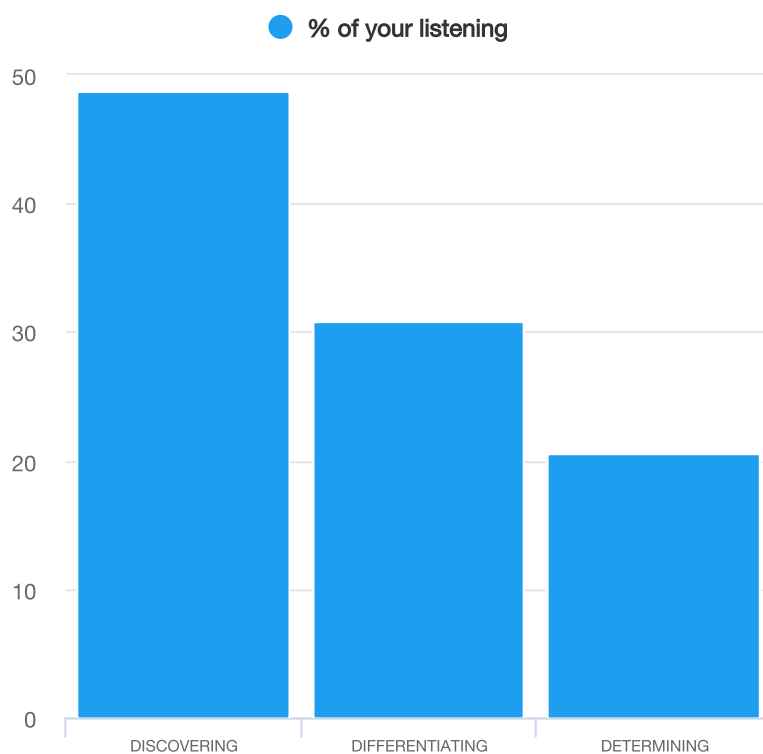


Figure 1: how you currently tend to apportion your attention

There is no simple, right-or-wrong allocation of attention, so you may find it useful to reflect on the following questions:

- ▲ Do I give too much attention to a particular purpose?
- ▲ Do I give too little attention to a particular purpose?
- ▲ In what circumstances might each purpose be particularly important for me?
- ▲ In what circumstances might each purpose be particularly valuable for the conversation?
- ▲ Why does my profile currently have this particular shape and emphasis?

Exploring your own Listening Profile

2. How that compares with others

Another issue to consider is how the allocation of your listening attention compares with others'. This can help to illuminate why relationships with some people can feel easy and comfortable, while others can be harder. In relation to the typical scores obtained from VoicePrint research, your current profile looks as follows:

	Low (lower quartile)	Low/Medium	Medium	Medium/High	High (upper quartile)
DISCOVERING					
DIFFERENTIATING					
DETERMINING					

Figure 2: your division of listening by comparison with other people

Again, there is no simple, right-or-wrong, good or bad profile. Your profile will have acquired the shape that it does, because in important respects that pattern will be serving you usefully. However, at the same time there are likely to be costs, or potential costs, associated with these benefits.

You may find it useful to reflect on questions such as:

- ▲ In which interactions or relationships do my relatively high scores serve me well?
- ▲ In which interactions or relationships do my relatively high scores create difficulties?
- ▲ When do my relatively low scores constitute a missed opportunity?
- ▲ When are my medium range tendencies simply not as much as the relationship needs?
- ▲ Which particular interactions or relationships do I find most difficult or frustrating?
- ▲ How might the way I am listening be contributing to that difficulty?
- ▲ How could I usefully vary the way I listen in that interaction or relationship?

Exploring your own Listening Profile

3. Your hot buttons

Most of the items in the VoicePrint Listening questionnaire are concerned with where our attention is drawn while we listen. Two of the questions, however, focus on the opposite, on what tends to turn our attention off. We need to be aware of these negative sensitivities too, so that they don't become disabling reflexes. Becoming more aware of our own sensitivities can also help us to become more mindful of other people's sensitivities, which may well be very different from our own.

We all have a wide range of potential turn-offs. As always, context is critical. Different behaviours may affect our listening negatively at different times. Having said that, research shows that individuals often have one especially hot button. So what is yours?

If your responses to the self-report questionnaire suggest that a particular behaviour is highly likely to impair your own listening, it is highlighted below:

Your hot button	Triggered by	May impair this aspect of your listening
	Feeling interrogated or overwhelmed. Too much exploration and too little action.	DISCOVERING
	Feeling patronised or talked at. Individuals dominating the discussion.	DIFFERENTIATING
	Feeling criticised or attacked. Being told what to do.	DETERMINING

Figure 3: Sensitivities that may impair your listening

Questions to consider in this connection include:

- ▲ Who elicits this reaction in me?
- ▲ When?
- ▲ What changes do I notice in my mood or my body, when I'm triggered like this?
- ▲ What might I say to myself to remain an active listener when this happens?
- ▲ How might I adjust my posture or non verbal body language to help me to compose myself?
- ▲ Which other form of listening might help me to recover balance and choice?
- ▲ What might I usefully say to people when this happens?

Exploring your own Listening Profile

4. Your self-talk

It is not only other people's behaviour that can affect the focus and quality of our listening. It can also be affected by our self-talk, especially when we are feeling stressed or under pressure. Two of the items in the listening questionnaire provide clues about how your listening might be distracted by thoughts and feelings from this direction.

As with external triggers, so also with internal distractions: there are many possibilities. The table below highlights the ones that appear, from your responses, to be somewhat stronger than most people's and therefore most likely to constitute distractions in your own case.

Pressure point	Triggered by	May reflect over concern with
	A tendency to be over-analytical and concern with unanswered questions	DISCOVERING
	A tendency to be too concerned with how things are expressed and needing to speak out	DIFFERENTIATING
	A tendency to be self critical and feeling pressure to meet your responsibilities	DETERMINING

Figure 4: potential distractions in your self-talk

Questions to consider in this connection include:

- ▲ What situations generate this sort of pressure for me?
- ▲ Are there particular people who elicit this response in me?
- ▲ When?
- ▲ What changes do I notice in my mood or my body, when I'm triggered like this?
- ▲ How might I adjust my posture or body language to help me to compose myself?
- ▲ What am I saying to myself at moments like that?
- ▲ What might I say to myself to help me to recover balance and choice?
- ▲ How might I adjust the tone of how I talk to myself at moments like this?

Exploring your own Listening Profile

5. Talking and Listening - combining your resources

Are you a talker or a listener? Taken literally, the question is absurdly binary. We do both. But how do you combine and balance the two activities? Do you give more time or weight to one or the other? Those are subtler and potentially more useful questions. Since both talking and listening are important parts of communication and interaction, paying too much attention to one becomes a lost opportunity in terms of the other.

Why might you use one of these resources rather than the other? Broadly, listening provides more time and space for your own noticing and thinking, but leaves you more dependent on others to generate input (and momentum). Talking provides more opportunity to steer, clarify and demonstrate your own distinctive contribution, but being more revealing is potentially more risky inter-personally. Within that broad generalisation there is one particular cost-benefit differential to remember.

Listening works particularly well for Discovering because, although it is dependent on the quality of other people's questions and responses, it leaves the mind most open for the process of finding out. It's our best opportunity to concentrate on the speaker and pay unfiltered attention to noticing what is happening and emerging in the conversation.

Differentiating and Determining are both more focused, less open-minded, forms of listening. With them we are using the time and space provided by listening (or more precisely by not talking) either to think about or decide about what is being said. These are useful activities in themselves, especially when immediacy is important, but are forms of split attention which divert energy away from open-minded exploration.

Before we look at how your self-report listening profile relates to your self-report voices profile, here is a short exercise that you may find useful. It's in two parts.

First, think about how you spend your time. Work from one column to the next across the table provided below. Mark up whether you spend a high, moderate or low proportion of your time listening. Then make a note of whether you spend a high, moderate or low proportion of your time talking. Then refine those answers by sub-dividing them further. Do you spend a high, moderate or low proportion of your talking time talking with other people? And do you spend a high, moderate or low proportion of your talking time talking to yourself? Finally - you've guessed it, how much of your listening time listening to others? And how much is listening to yourself, to your inner dialogue?

There is no need to worry about exact measurements. Instinctive, impressionistic answers are enough to help you to think more deeply about the balance of talk and listening in your life

	Listening	Talking	Talking with others	Talking to myself	Listening to others	Listening to myself
High						
Moderate						
Low						

That's the first step.

Now focus more closely on the last four columns. Reflect on what it's like when you talk with others, when you talk to yourself, when you listen to others and when you listen to yourself. Are there particular times when each of these activities is particularly important (or perhaps particularly unimportant) for you? How would you characterise or describe it, when it's happening?

Exploring your own Listening Profile

Activity	When is it important for me and what's it like?
Talking with others	
Talking to myself	
Listening to others	
Listening to myself	

Capturing some reflections here will sharpen your awareness about how you currently use the resources at your disposal for both listening and talking. It will also help you to capture more insights and action possibilities from the final section of your profile, which relates your self-reported listening profile to your self-reported use of the nine voices.

Exploring your own Listening Profile

How does your listening profile relate to your use of the nine voices?

The answer varies widely from one individual to another. For some people there is a strong correlation between their two profiles: the relative attention given to discovering, differentiating and determining is very similar in both their listening and their talking. But these are a minority of cases.

More commonly, the picture is more complex. For example, you might use listening rather than asking as your principal means of finding out. Or you might openly inquire, probe and diagnose, but when listening to the answers be primarily focused on drawing distinctions or arriving at conclusions. Someone else might use listening both to gather data and to sort it out in their own head, reserving the spoken word for raising objections or issuing instructions.

The permutations are many and varied, and all part of the highly individual way in which we communicate and interact.

Listening and talking - and their myriad non-verbal accompaniments, including posture, gesture, tone, volume, pitch, pace and emphasis - are essentially resources. They are forms of resourcefulness that are available to us - and that we use either by instinct and reflex or mindfully and through choice - in our interactions with life and each other.

What really matters is to be aware of these resources, their potential value and potential impacts, to be sensitive to when and how they are used and to be skilful and considerate in using them to good effect.

According to your self-report, the way that you are currently using your listening and your voices looks like this:

	Your listening profile	Your voices profile	Your voice tendencies, overall and under pressure (P)					Your voices pressure profile	
	%	%		Very Low	Low	Medium	High	Very high	%
Discovering/Exploring	49	32	Probe					P	36
			Inquire			P			
			Diagnose	P					
Differentiating/Positioning	31	43	Articulate	P					31
			Advocate			P			
			Advise					P	
Determining/Controlling	21	26	Challenge		P				33
			Direct				P		
			Evaluate					P	

Figure 4: Comparing your listening and voices profiles

It will also help you to capture more insights and action possibilities from the final section of your profile which is available if you have done the voices questionnaire and relates your self-reported listening profile to your self-reported use of the nine voices.

Exploring your own Listening Profile

You may find it helpful to reflect on questions such as these:

- ▲ What are the benefits of using my resourcefulness in this way?
- ▲ What are the potential costs, to myself, my relationships, my reputation, my prospects?
- ▲ When might it be beneficial to vary this pattern?
- ▲ When might it be useful to listen more?
- ▲ When might it be useful to speak out more?
- ▲ Do I realise how resourceful I can be in practice?

Exploring your own Listening Profile

Q1	What I personally value most about listening is that...								
a	it reveals what has happened and what needs to be done	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b	it confirms or modifies my own views and opinions	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c	it develops both understanding and relationships	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Q2	While listening to others, I tend to think about...								
a	how I feel and where I stand on the subject	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b	what the ramifications and implications might be	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c	whether I have correctly understood what they are saying	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Q3	I pay particular attention to discussions that...								
a	are about new and unfamiliar topics	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b	are about reaching a decision	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c	involve widely different or strongly expressed views	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Q4	I listen most carefully when people...								
a	tell me exactly what they need from me	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b	put forward their suggestions for action	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c	present thought-provoking questions	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Q5	I find it most difficult to give people my undivided attention...								
a	when I feel interrogated or overwhelmed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b	when I feel patronised or talked at	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c	when I feel criticised or attacked	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Q6	My self-talk has a tendency to be...								
a	self-critical	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b	over-analytical	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c	very concerned with how things are expressed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Q7	When I'm feeling stressed, my listening may be distracted by...								
a	outstanding questions	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

b	pressure to do what is expected	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c	needing to speak out	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Q8	My listening may be somewhat biased by....								
a	my own opinions	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b	my preference for order	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c	my sense of curiosity	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Q9	My impatience is most commonly triggered by...								
a	individuals dominating the discussion	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b	being told what to do	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c	too much exploration and too little action	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Q10	I listen to others to help me to...								
a	make decisions	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b	identify new questions and learn	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c	recognise important distinctions	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7