

January 2008

# Are You "Wanted" for Poor Listening Habits?

Nanette Johnson-Curiskis

*Minnesota State University - Mankato*, [nanette.johnson-curiskis@mnsu.edu](mailto:nanette.johnson-curiskis@mnsu.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/ctamj>



Part of the [Communication Commons](#), and the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#)

## Recommended Citation

Johnson-Curiskis, N. (2008). Are You "Wanted" for Poor Listening Habits. *Communication and Theater Association of Minnesota Journal*, 35, 99-101.

This Teacher's Workbook is brought to you for free and open access by Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Communication and Theater Association of Minnesota Journal* by an authorized editor of Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato.

## *Are You "Wanted" For Poor Listening Habits?*

***Nanette Johnson-Curiskis***  
*Associate Professor*  
*nanette.johnson-curiskis@mnsu.edu*  
*Department of Speech Communication*  
*Minnesota State University, Mankato*  
*Mankato, MN*

### **ABSTRACT**

*In order to begin a semester or unit on effective listening with some basic theory and knowledge and to serve as an icebreaker, students are asked to design and share a "Wanted Poster" describing their poor listening habits. The significance of this assignment was guided by the ubiquitous nature of listening. Research verifies listening as the most utilized form of communication.*

In order to begin a semester or unit on effective listening with some basic theory and knowledge and to serve as an icebreaker, students are asked to develop a Listening Wanted Poster. The significance of this assignment was guided by the ubiquitous nature of listening. Research verifies listening as the most utilized form of communication. "If frequency is a measure of importance, then listening easily qualifies as the most prominent kind of communication" (Adler & Rodman, 1997, p. 283). In 1926, Paul T. Rankin conducted what is considered the breakthrough study of listening. Statistically, Rankin found that 45% of communication time was spent listening, while 30% was spent speaking, 16% was spent reading and nine percent was spent writing (Floyd, 1998). Rankin's statistics are consistently cited and replicated in the fields of communication and listening. Current research continues to substantiate Rankin's original results. People spend a great deal of time listening in many contexts; unfortunately, "[M]ost people do not necessarily do it well" (Floyd, 1998, p. 2). Researchers Beloit and Lee "found that 25 percent of what most people listen to can be recalled. Of that 25 percent, 80 percent is distorted or not accurately received; this leaves only 5 percent of the total message accurately received" (in Seiler & Beall, 2005, p. 145).

Students begin this assignment by accessing *Listening is a 10 Part Skill* by Dr. Ralph G. Nichols, the "Father of the Field of Listening." This document is available online at [http://www.listen.org/Templates/Nichols\\_10\\_Part\\_Skill.pdf](http://www.listen.org/Templates/Nichols_10_Part_Skill.pdf). In addition, for students who prefer oral to written material, an audio version of a speech by Dr. Nichols covering this subject matter is available at [http://www.listen.org/Templates/nichols/ralph\\_nichols.html](http://www.listen.org/Templates/nichols/ralph_nichols.html). The 10 listening skills introduced by Dr. Nichols in the 1950s continue to be credible. After reading or listening to *Listening is a 10 Part Skill*, students prepare a "Wanted Poster" describing themselves and their worst listening habits (adapted from Cooper & Simonds, 1999). Posters are shared with

classmates. Discussion concludes the assignment. Whether this class is online or meets face to face, the discussion centers on improving the listening skills which the students identify as well as introducing concepts to be covered throughout the course. The discussion and posters allow the instructor to add valuable reinforcement to the original reading or speech.

Discussion revolves around what each student defines as an offense and how it complicates their listening and their communication. Because all students see others' offenses, there is awareness that no one is exempt from listening faults. The discussion also allows students to realize they are not "alone" in struggling with their listening skills.

This activity also serves as a barometer which can determine future assignments or activities. For example, if many students define their offense as failure to eliminate noise, the instructor can design activities to highlight how to recognize and eliminate noise; if information overload is a common theme, the instructor can include activities which define overload and construct activities that allow students to understand why and how overload affects their listening.

The specific directions to students include:

1. Watch or listen to "Listening is a 10 Part Skill" ([http://www.listen.org/Templates/Nichols\\_10\\_Part\\_Skill.pdf](http://www.listen.org/Templates/Nichols_10_Part_Skill.pdf)) or ([http://www.listen.org/Templates/nichols/ralph\\_nichols.html](http://www.listen.org/Templates/nichols/ralph_nichols.html))
2. Obtain or make a picture of yourself (clip art, actual digital photo, caricature, etc.)
3. Choose an offense, a bad listening habit of which you are guilty. Explain the offense in detail under your picture by composing a beginning paragraph describing your offense and the trouble it has caused you (5 sentences minimum). Others will be seeing your posters; be prepared to share your work.

Some ideas

1. *I can be seen (heard)...*
2. *Use extreme caution because I...*
3. *I am usually found...*
4. Make up an alias for yourself which has to do with your listening offense.
5. Write a 2nd paragraph with a physical description (3 sentence minimum) of yourself as an offender. Use a physical description that "fits" your offense rather than a simple physical description of yourself.
6. Finish with a statement of a reward which is consistent with your crime (1 or 2 sentences)
7. Your posters will be shared with others.

Sample of previous wanted posters can be accessed at:

- *Wanted Sample 1* ([http://mavdisk.mnsu.edu/johnsn3/wanted\\_sample\\_1.htm](http://mavdisk.mnsu.edu/johnsn3/wanted_sample_1.htm))
- *Wanted Sample 2* ([http://mavdisk.mnsu.edu/johnsn3/wanted\\_sample\\_2.htm](http://mavdisk.mnsu.edu/johnsn3/wanted_sample_2.htm))
- *Wanted Sample 3* ([http://mavdisk.mnsu.edu/johnsn3/wanted\\_sample\\_3.pdf](http://mavdisk.mnsu.edu/johnsn3/wanted_sample_3.pdf))

This assignment has been used with traditional college students, as an in-class assignment and as an online assignment. It has also been used for business training sessions. It has always

been overwhelmingly successful particularly as an introduction to effective listening. By breaking down the listening process and then identifying his/her own specific problems, students are able to "own" their behavior. They can use the knowledge throughout the semester to apply concepts to their own situation. The wanted posters are often referred to throughout the semester thereby reinforcing the concepts and skills needed by effective listeners. This assignment explores the beginning of the path on the journey to improving important listening skills.

### References

- Adler, R., & Rodman, G. (1997). *Understanding human communication* (6th ed.). Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.
- Cooper, P., & Simonds, C. (1999). *Instructor's manual for communication for the classroom teacher* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Floyd, J. (1998). *Improving listening abilities*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.
- Hunsaker, R. (1983). *Understanding and developing the skills of oral communication: Speaking and listening*. Englewood, CO: Morton.
- Nichols, R. (1957). *Listening is a 10 Part Skill*. Retrieved January 15, 2008, from [http://www.listen.org/Templates/nichols/ralph\\_nichols.html](http://www.listen.org/Templates/nichols/ralph_nichols.html)
- Nichols, R. (n.d.). Listening is a 10 Part Skill [audio recording]. Retrieved January 15, 2008, from [http://www.listen.org/Templates/nichols/ralph\\_nichols.html](http://www.listen.org/Templates/nichols/ralph_nichols.html)
- Seiler, W., & Beall, M. (2005). *Communication: Making connections*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.