



# The Listening Blocks

People often resist effective communication by using “listening blocks” - unconscious techniques we use to avoid listening to information that we don’t want to hear. It is imperative to become more aware of your own listening blocks because they will prevent you from effective listening regardless of how many communications seminars you might attend. Also, being aware of listening blocks will help you to manage other people when they are blocking what you are saying.

The following are common listening blocks. Which ones do you tend to use to avoid listening to others?

The Listening Blocks	How do you experience these blocks?
<p><b>Rehearsing</b></p> <p>Instead of truly listening, you are thinking about what you will say next. Although you may put on the appearance of listening, your focus is on your response. This means that although your answer may be well thought out, you are responding to what you <b>think</b> you heard, not necessarily to what was actually said.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> I use this block <input type="checkbox"/> Others use this to block me
<p><b>Judging</b></p> <p>Judging is the mental-emotional act of looking down at someone and of finding fault with them in some way from a superior perspective. Once you have judged someone (e.g., incompetent, irrational, stupid, radical, touchy-feely, etc.), it is easy to invalidate what they say without reflection. Judgment is a good defense against listening to other peoples’ points of view and looking critically at your own. Judging can also be an excellent defense against your own feelings of inadequacy.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> I use this block <input type="checkbox"/> Others use this to block me
<p><b>Denying</b></p> <p>This is a classic and universal listening block for which alcoholics and politicians are most notorious. As soon as someone brings up an issue that you don’t want to hear, you block the information by immediately negating it. It’s an effective technique to assure that no communication can occur.</p> <p>Everyone uses denying at some time. Any time you see yourself immediately and unconditionally dismissing someone’s point, you may want to ask yourself if denial is at work.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> I use this block <input type="checkbox"/> Others use this to block me
<p><b>Identifying</b></p> <p>Identifying means using what others talk about as a platform to launch your own story. Instead of being present and truly listening, you are self-absorbed - your mind races ahead and looks for an opportunity to jump in. When your friend begins to tell you about her trip to Manhattan, you launch into a story about the man you met there in 1987. You are so consumed by your story that you don’t realize that you cut her off.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> I use this block <input type="checkbox"/> Others use this to block me
<p><b>Rationalizing</b></p> <p>Rationalizing is a defense against feeling blamed or at risk. It means making excuses, sometimes absurdly elaborate, to dismiss a point that someone raises. It protects you from taking a closer look at yourself and at behavior and motivations that you may be unaware of.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> I use this block <input type="checkbox"/> Others use this to block me
<p><b>Black &amp; White Thinking</b></p> <p>Black &amp; White Thinking is an aggressive block which distorts the speaker’s point of view to the point of absurdity. It boils all possibilities down to just two choices. This confuses the speaker and throws his point off track. One sign that someone is using black &amp; white thinking is if you hear yourself saying, “That’s <u>not</u> what I’m saying!”</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> I use this block <input type="checkbox"/> Others use this to block me



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<p><b>Minimizing</b></p> <p>Minimizing is a subtle and effective form of denial, which has become quite popular. It is a technique by which one literally minimizes the speaker's point of view. Although it can be done in a subtle way, with a tone of "positive thinking" so that the speaker hardly notices it, it is nonetheless a form of invalidation. One example of minimizing would be: "I think you're overreacting..."</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> I use this block</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Others use this to block me</p>
<p><b>Advising</b></p> <p>Instead of listening, you like to "help" by giving advice. Sometimes this is done in an important and superior manner leaving the other person feeling not listened to, even put down. Even if there is no superior manner, you may tend to give advice too quickly. You don't understand what advice is needed because you haven't listened! Generally, listen thoroughly, and ask permission before giving advice.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> I use this block</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Others use this to block me</p>
<p><b>Sparring</b></p> <p>Sparring means that you seem to enjoy arguing and debating. Your real intention is not to communicate, synthesize, or learn from the other. Instead, you value the process of arguing, defending your point of view, and pushing it on to others. You may even tell people that, "I like to argue." Unfortunately, you don't realize that other people may not share your pleasure. They find your debating uncomfortable and would prefer mutual listening over verbal sparring.</p> <p>To avoid sparring, actively listen: repeat back what you have heard and acknowledge the point instead of immediately disagreeing. Then you can present your alternative point of view.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> I use this block</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Others use this to block me</p>
<p><b>Being Right</b></p> <p>Being right is a cousin of sparring. It means that your sense of self-esteem depends upon your point of view being "right," as if there were always only a "right" and "wrong." It is an effective defense against looking at yourself - your beliefs, politics, behaviors, and feelings. You won't listen to criticism; you won't take feedback; you block out alternative points of view. Since you can't hear such information, you can't effectively grow and adapt.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> I use this block</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Others use this to block me</p>
<p><b>Derailing</b></p> <p>Derailing means avoiding a topic by abruptly changing the subject on the other person. It is a verbal technique used to avoid subjects you are uncomfortable with. An effective form of derailment is to "laugh off" a topic with a joke. This is a hard technique to counter without being accused of being "too sensitive."</p> <p>Derailment is a good technique to keep people at a distance and to avoid your own feeling of discomfort for the given subject.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> I use this block</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Others use this to block me</p>
<p><b>Nitpicking</b></p> <p>This is the block of picking some small aspect of the other person's presentation and finding fault with it so as to obscure the overall message. Nitpicking often takes on an excessively intellectual quality that is especially counter-productive when the topic has non-intellectual dimensions to it.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> I use this block</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Others use this to block me</p>



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The Listening Blocks	How do you experience these blocks?
<p><b>Counterattacking</b></p> <p>Counterattacking is an effective technique used to quickly neutralize input that you don't want to hear. Instead of listening thoughtfully and responding to the other person's needs, you block him/her by focusing on some aspect of the behavior that causes problems for you. This is a more aggressive version of derailing.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> I use this block</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Others use this to block me</p>
<p><b>Placating</b></p> <p>If your primary orientation is to avoid conflict and please people, your primary listening style is to placate. With your presence, you "go along" with the other person even if you inwardly disagree. "Uh huh, yeah, of course, sure..." Smiling and nodding, your attention is on blending with the other person, not voicing your own needs.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> I use this block</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Others use this to block me</p>
<p><b>"Agreeing"</b></p> <p>"Agreeing" describes the act of going along with the speaker to avoid conflict. In contrast to placating, which is a relatively unconscious non-verbal response, "agreeing" is more elaborate and verbal. People who "agree" succeed in avoiding conflict, but they don't take the action that they supposedly signed up for, which means the conflict will probably arise again later.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> I use this block</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Others use this to block me</p>
<p><b>Dreaming</b></p> <p>When we dream, we pretend to listen but really tune the other person out while we drift about in our interior fantasies. Instead of disciplining ourselves to truly concentrate on the input, we "turn the channel" to a more entertaining subject. This is also known as "pseudo-listening."</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> I use this block</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Others use this to block me</p>

### Listening Blocks - A Final Point

If your intention is to avoid hearing the needs of others and to block out thoughts that threaten your belief system, these listening blocks are effective techniques. However, if you hope to grow in your ability to manage your thoughts and feelings so as to better understand others, you will need to become more mindful of how you use these blocks on a daily basis. Only through enhanced awareness can you begin to replace the habit of listening blocks with genuine listening techniques.