A Concise Guide to Interviewing

Jeralyn Faris, PhD
Brian Lamb School of Communication
Purdue University
jlfaris@purdue.edu
CHAPTER 1  INTRODUCTION
1.1  Interviewing: Part of Everyday Life
1.2  Purpose and Overview

CHAPTER 2  WHAT IS INTERVIEWING?
2.1  A Definition
2.2  Types of Interviewing

CHAPTER 3:  IT’S ALL ABOUT RELATING…
3.1  Relational Factors
   3.1.1  Trust
   3.1.2  Respect
   3.1.3  Similarity
   3.1.4  Interdependence
   3.1.5  Control
      3.1.1.1  Directive
      3.1.1.2  Nondirective

CHAPTER 4:  …AND COMMUNICATING
4.1  Communication Behaviors
   3.1.2  Verbal
   3.1.3  Nonverbal
   3.1.4  Listening
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. INTERVIEWING: A PART OF EVERYDAY LIFE

I walked to the cell phone kiosk of our wholesale club knowing that I needed help! Choosing the most economical plan but one that met all the data needs for five users of smartphones on one share plan meant that I had to ask questions---and lots of them. Is this an interview situation? Most certainly! And this particular interview was one in which the phone kiosk representative asked me a number of questions, too. In order to best communicate with each other, the roles of interviewer and interviewee switched back and forth between us for the 45-minute visit that concluded with my decision and her selling of the phones and a plan. A specific purpose was accomplished by both parties.

I begin this Concise Guide to Interviewing with this story to illustrate one of a multitude of everyday situations in which interviewing is central. Few people realize the ubiquitous nature of the skill of interviewing. That is: interviewing is very much a part of your daily interactions. Many people take a course in interviewing in preparation for employment interviews, but interviewing has been and will continue to be an integral part of your life.

Some of you will engage in this communication activity more than others, but developing skill in the basic elements of interviewing will prove useful in a variety of settings and applications. Team sports, academics, job situations, parenting, legal settings, buying and selling---relationships of all sorts benefit from the skill of asking good, well-framed questions and responding thoughtful answers. Purposes vary, but developing expertise in the craft of interviewing can add to your repertoire of marketable skills. Consider interviewing as a tool to aid you in many aspects of your personal and professional life!

1.3. PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW

The purpose of this book is to provide a concise overview of the basic elements required to become a more skilled communicator as both an interviewer and interviewee. Therefore, Chapter 2 focuses on a definition and the types of interviewing. Chapter 3 examines relational factors and communication behaviors that affect an interview.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus primarily on tasks required of an interviewer. However, as you learn the how’s and why’s of these responsibilities for an interviewer you will gain knowledge and be better
prepared for the role of interviewee. Chapter 4 targets “the good, the bad, and the ugly” of crafting questions and delineates types of questions, their purposes, and how to design good questions to accomplish the specific purpose of a given interview setting. The skill of asking questions also includes knowing question pitfalls to avoid, so attention is given to recognizing ineffective or inappropriate questions. Chapter 5 outlines various ways to structure an interview. Discreet, sensitive openings and closings can leave lasting impressions, and the flow of the body of an interview plays a vital part in its success or failure. Therefore, necessary time and thinking must be afforded to the interview’s organization and design.

Chapters 6 through 9 provide more in-depth instruction for some specific types of interviews: journalistic, employment, motivational, persuasive, and focus group interviews. These various types of interviews vary according to the specific purposes and, therefore, require specific consideration of the ways people interact in various settings. Attention is given to the interviewee and the interviewer for each type of interview setting.

The intent of this Concise Guide is to familiarize you with the basic tenets of interviewing, provide knowledge of how to apply them in various settings, and equip you with a quick reference tool when you need review for future situations. I hope you find this a helpful, handy resource whether you find yourself at a phone sales kiosk, with a job recruiter, helping a friend make a major decision, or any other situation that employs the skill of asking good questions and/or answering them well.
2.1 A DEFINITION

Give the word “inter-view” a quick thought, and what do you discover? The prefix “inter” means “between” or “together.” The prefix refers to a sharing between two entities, and when placed with the last syllable of the word, a simple definition of the word is a “sharing of views.” However, as with any form of communication, an interview is a much more complex event than a simple sharing of views.

Two foremost authorities on interviewing, Charles Stewart and William Cash (2014) define an interview as “an interactional communication process between two parties, at least one of whom has a predetermined and serious purpose, that involves the asking and answering of questions” (p. 2). The term “interactional” addresses the idea of a sharing of views, but what does the word “process” highlight? An interview is a dynamic communication event, one that is ever-changing and not static. No two interviews will ever be the same, and usually we cannot anticipate the questions or the answers that will unfold in a given setting. Therefore, interviewing should not be approached as a simple behavior that you can practice and get “right” but as a particular communication opportunity that needs thoughtful preparation and consideration.

Notice that the definition above states there are “two parties” (as opposed to “people”) because either or both of the parties can include more than one person. For example, two or three recruiters from a company can be involved in interviewing a potential employee, and there are usually 8-12 interviewees in a focus group interview. One or both parties come to the interview situation with a “predetermined and serious purpose” that varies according to the context but there is always a giving and receiving of information. The questions asked and the answers given through verbal and nonverbal means are often dependant on the purposes of both parties in the interview context. An overview of the various types of interviews can help identify and clarify purpose and context.

2:2 TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Books and websites that focus on interviewing use a variety of terms to refer to numerous interview situations. Do a google search, and the vast majority of hits direct you to “employment” interviews, but these are only one aspect of interviews used in any number of selection processes (e.g.,
graduate or law school application, job performance review and promotion, etc.). Law enforcement officials refer to “investigative” or “forensic” interviewing. “Journalistic” interviewing can also be referred to as “investigative” or fall under the broader umbrella of an “information-gathering” interview. In mental and physical health settings, descriptive titles for interviewing include “assessment,” “diagnostic,” “therapeutic,” and “motivational” interviewing. “Survey interviews” are used by pollsters to collect data for various organizations. “Focus group” interviews are used in social and consumer research settings. For the purposes of this book, I choose to highlight a few of the types of interviewing. Brief definitions are provided here and more detail follows in later chapters on how to prepare for and engage in these interview settings.

2:2:1 *Journalistic interviews* are the basic tools of news reporters, but the term can apply to any interview situation in which a person is seeking information that they can chronicle or record. This type of interview has the goal of answering the who, what, where, when, why, and how questions surrounding events, biographical accounts, historical developments, etc. People are asked to tell their stories and/or share their knowledge of a particular subject, and a journalistic interview draws on “emotions, opinions, and speculation” of people who provide information (Anderson & Killenberg, 2009, p. 131).

2:2:2 *Employment interviews* can be categorized in the following stages, but the selection process can include one or a combination of the following:

2:2:2:1 *Informational interviews* precedes the formal employment interview process and is initiated by a person who is exploring opportunities in a particular field of employment. The term was coined by Richard Nelson Bolles (2014), author of the best-selling career handbook *What Color Is Your Parachute?* Companies often welcome potential employees to contact the personnel department for the purpose of learning more about the company, possible internships or employment opportunities. It’s one way of exploring your options.

2:2:2:2 *Phone interviews* are used increasingly as a first step in the employment interview process. Employers “weed out” applicants and lower the costs of the hiring process by reducing the number of in-person interviews. In order to progress to the next level, applicants need to be aware of aspects of phone interviews.

2:2:2:3 *Candidate group interviews* place you with a group of applicants who are applying for the same job. This is often another means of narrowing the pool of applicants and sometimes employs group activities as well as questions and answers in order to determine how the participants work in a group setting.

2:2:2:4 *One-on-one recruitment interviews* are the mainstay of employment interviews and demand systematic self-analysis and analytical preparation. Research of the prospective company, knowing your strengths and weaknesses, and being prepared to present yourself in ways that keep you “in the running” for a desired position are some of the aspects we will consider.

2:2:2:5 *Panel group interviews* sometimes follow the one-on-one recruitment interview. In this interview situation, you are asked questions individually by a panel of two or more employer representatives, and you are probably among the “finalists” for the position.

2:2:3 *Motivational interviewing* is a technique that has been developed for use by anyone who is in a counseling or helping role. The goal is to assist the interviewee in finding his or her own motivation to change a problematic behavior (e.g., smoking, poor time management, etc.) and is used in a variety of settings. A dietician helping a diabetic, a strength trainer assisting someone in
developing an exercise regimen, or a student helping a friend who is missing classes and procrastinating on homework are a few of the myriad of situations in which motivational interviewing is applied.

2:2:4 Persuasive interviews have a goal of influencing the attitudes, values, beliefs, and actions of others. Stewart and Cash (2014) state that these are mutual interactions “in which both parties must play active and critical roles because persuasion is done with and not to another” (emphasis theirs, p. 285). It is common in this type of interview for both parties to come with the understanding that, for example, the interviewer is “selling” a product or idea, attempting to recruit the other person to be a member of an organization, or enlisting their vote in an election. We will discuss ethical approaches and how to prepare as interviewer and interviewee in these environments.

2.2.5 Focus Group interviews is a unique method that involves a group of people discussing a specific set of issues or sharing opinions on products for market research. This type of interview is often conducted to assess peoples’ interest in or opinions of current and/or new products, programs, and policies. Participants are usually recruited by the interviewer(s) in these group interview settings.

The types of interviews listed here are not exhaustive but provide an outline of some of the most commonly experienced interview settings that form the framework for chapters six through nine. However, before we delve into the specifics of engaging in the various types of interviews, remember the first part of the definition provided earlier in this chapter: an interview is an “interactional communication process.” Therefore, we need to examine some relational factors and communication behaviors that are critical to success in these interpersonal situations.
Communication skill in interviewing is likely to increase when you understand the complexity of the interpersonal process central to the definition provided in the last chapter. In order for you to engage successfully in the dynamics of this multifaceted process, you need to know the components that influence how you participate as either an interviewer or an interviewee. Therefore, we will identify and examine some relational factors and communication behaviors that directly affect this type of interpersonal encounter.

3.2 RELATIONAL FACTORS

Since people are assuming the roles of interviewers and interviewees, we need to be familiar with some of the many factors that influence the ways individuals relate to one another in an interview context. We will briefly examine perceptions of trust, respect, similarity, interdependence, and control because each of these elements affect the relationships between the parties of an interview. Knowing and being sensitive to these relational factors is an important step in preparing for a successful interview.

3.2.1 Trust can be defined as a confident expectation of each other, a mutual reliance between the two parties of the interview that leads to a collaborative relationship. It is likely that both the interviewee and the interviewer depend on or assume that the other has integrity and will fulfill the responsibilities inherent in the interaction. In a health setting, for example, a doctor needs to have a certain level of trust in the patient to honestly answer his or her questions, and the patient trusts the doctor to have his or her best interests in mind.

Stewart and Cash (2014) assert that trust is necessary in every interview, but they also emphasize that developing trust is a process that occurs over time. Both parties usually have questions about the reality of their trust assumptions, so both parties need to work to build trust. Do your homework as interviewee or interviewer by doing research to increase your credibility. Be knowledgeable, informed, and thoughtful in your preparation for the interaction (Anderson & Killenberg, 2009). In so doing, you are more likely to be trustworthy in the sight of the other person(s).

If you are the interviewer, you need to know as much as you can about the other person(s) or the circumstances surrounding the subject of the interaction. For example, an investigative reporter needs to do homework about the situation in order to ask reasonable and informed questions. A
recruiter needs to read the prospective employee’s resume and cover letter. As interviewee you need to consider the purpose of the person’s questioning and be prepared with information or, in the case of being an applicant in an employment interview, research the company and job requirements in order to be prepared not only to answer but to ask informed questions about the company and/or job. Trust develops as both parties increase their credibility with one another, and collaboration based on trust can be a catalyst for success in fulfilling the goal of the interview.

3.2.2. Respect is necessary in your approach to the other party in an interview and is characterized by esteem and having a sense of the worth of a person. Communicate to the person(s) verbally and nonverbally that they are valuable human being(s) and deserve your attention! Be cordial, warm, amiable, show regard for, and defer to the other person. Treat them as more important than yourself. Even an investigative interview that might be construed as threatening needs to be approached with an attitude of positive regard and respect for the other person (Black & Yeschke, 2014). This aspect of the interview is extremely important in any setting as it affects both parties’ motivation to communicate with one another.

Anderson and Killenberg (2009) apply this concept to an employment interview, by stating that whether you are the recruiter or the applicant, you need to “get out of yourself...expand your focus to include the needs and goals of the other person. Interviewees cannot frame the situation selfishly because organizations won’t select employees (or graduate students, interns, or other applicants) who appear only out for themselves. Similarly interviewers cannot frame the situation in terms of organizational demands or take-it-or-leave-it attitudes because the best potential employees will avoid such positions…” (p. 198).

A person engenders respect through verbal and nonverbal means, and we will learn more about that shortly. For now, understand the importance of respect for the other(s) as an aspect of a successful interview encounter.

3.2.3 Similarity reflects the degree to which the parties in an interview are like one another (or not), and research has abounded over the years on the effect of similarity on positive attraction (Burleson & Samter, 1996; Montoya & Horton, 2012). Perceptions of similarity will be created and altered through an interview interaction (Sunnafrank, 1991) with many potential factors (e.g., age, gender, culture, values, appearance, personality, attitudes, educational level, etc.) The degree to which we sense commonality with the other person(s) impacts our ability to establish rapport, but we need to remember that assumptions of similarity may not always be accurate (Mathison, 1988). As communication scholars Duck and Barnes (1992) point out, “it is not similarity of attitudes, and all the rest, that is important of itself, but KNOWING that you are deeply similar in the meaning that you attach to things that count” (emphasis theirs, p. 206). Later in this book, I will discuss these “things that count” in an interview, but for now, understand that as interviewee or interviewer, similarity and recognition of similarity are both important ways that you and the other person will convey meaning. Therefore, be sensitive to accurate perceptions of similarity.

3.2.4 Interdependence is the quality of the interview interaction that is demonstrated by a mutual reliance by the two parties. The interview depends on the coherent yet distinct performance of each person. What one person says or does in the conversation directly affects the other. In their book
on qualitative research interviewing, Kvale and Brinkman (2009) use the ambiguous drawing used by Danish gestalt philosopher Rubin (Figure 1.1) that can be seen as either a vase or two faces. This image exemplifies the “dual aspect of the interview—the personal interrelation and the interview knowledge that it leads to” (p. 2). Both parties rely on one another to produce knowledge—of one another, of an organization, of the requirements of a job, of information needed for an investigation—whatever knowledge is the goal of one or both parties. Interdependence is thus a key in the success of any interview situation.

3.2.5 Control is exercised by one of the parties in the interview to direct the conversation to the intended goal. Usually, the interviewer has the control and guides the flow of the interview by the kinds of questions s/he asks.

3.2.5.1 Directive questions are used when the interviewer wants to maintain control. Typically, directive questions are closed and require brief, specific answers. If you watch an episode of Law and Order you will see attorneys using this type of question with witnesses to lead them to specific conclusions allowing little ability to explain or expound on their answer. Surveys and opinion polls are specific kinds of interviews that use a directive approach.

3.2.5.2 Nondirective questions are used when the interviewer intends to share the control, and the roles reverse for a time when the interviewee asks questions or continues to answer a question at length without interruption or redirection from the interviewer. Generally, the purpose of this type of questioning is to gain as much information from the interviewee as possible. Therefore, broad topics with open and neutral questions are employed to give opportunity to the person to take the conversation in the direction s/he chooses. Journalistic, oral history, and motivational interviews are good examples of nondirective interviews.

In many cases, an interviewer may plan to maintain control at times but then allow the interviewee to have control at other times. The established goal and the kind and extent of information desired by the interviewer will determine if and how much control is shared with the interviewee. You need to learn to be flexible as an interviewer, exercising control with directive questions when needed and relinquishing control with nondirective questions if it will assist in gaining desired information or lead to revelations you might not even know are coming. Allow yourself the adventure!

As interviewee, you need to be sensitive to the leading of the interviewer, especially in situations such as an employment interview. As you develop knowledge and skill as an interviewer, you will be able to apply that knowledge as an interviewee. You will be able to listen with greater attentiveness and negotiate with and respond to the verbal and nonverbal behavior of the other person. Enjoy learning to dance to his or her “lead”—the tone and relationship that the person sets.

All of the above relational factors—trust, respect, similarity, interdependence, and control—are certainly not exhaustive but are provided here to get you thinking about the importance of relational factors in the communication that occurs in any interview. Relationships are developed through a blend of verbal, nonverbal, and listening behaviors which are considered in the next chapter.
3.1 *Verbal, nonverbal, and listening behaviors* are in reality usually inseparable and “typically coordinated in ways that provide for their mutual performance” (Jones & LeBaron, 2002, p. 199). However, they are often studied and examined separately. A dynamic interplay occurs when two or more people exchange messages through sight and sound, and the more you can learn to attend to these messages, the more competent you will be in comprehending and responding to the other person(s). In other words, you need to *think* about the messages. Communication scholar John Greene’s (2007) Action Assembly Theory (AAT) was developed to help explain the essential processes of *thoughts* and *actions*—verbal and nonverbal. One of the practical applications of his research is that when you are facing a challenging communication situation (e.g., an employment or investigative interview) planning and practicing what to say, “assembling” your message, may help you speak more fluently. Learning organizing sequences (Greene, 2007, p. 178) in planning for an interview will also prove helpful in honing your verbal and nonverbal skills, and later chapters will provide specific suggestions for advance preparations in the various interview settings.

Fundamental interviewing techniques can be framed in these basic forms of verbal, nonverbal, and listening communication, and each shapes, in a sense, the context for the other. Therefore, though we examine them separately, we understand that these forms are integrated and dependent on one another. For example, a spoken message is likely to be disregarded by an interviewer if the nonverbal messages are in conflict with what is said. You might tell an employment recruiter, “I am confident,” but if your voice is quivering and your words are not fluent, the person might assume the physical indications contradict and overrule your verbal claim. Likewise, if you are a counselor in an interview whose purpose is to motivate someone to curtail excessive alcohol consumption but you smile when he is describing the results of such behavior, you are establishing a contextual environment that works against the purpose. If a wife asks her husband a question and gets response, she might assume he is not listening, and a breach in the relationship can occur.

3.2 *Verbal communication* is part of every day life for most of us. We use spoken and written words—language—in many contexts and for various reasons. In their textbook, *Interpersonal Communication*, Trenholm and Jensen (2013) list functions of language, and we have already briefly referenced the first three in the context of interviewing. Words are used to:

- give and seek information
- control and allow other(s) to control an interaction
monitor the process of communication. The other functions of language that Trenholm and Jensen delineate are critical for understanding how people interact in an interview. Words are also used to:

- declare identity—culturally, professionally, relationally, etc.
- control silence and the unknown
- express and control emotions
- reveal or mask thoughts and motives and
- initiate or avoid contact with others.

In any of these given purposes of language, we instinctively know from our own experience that words can be used for good or evil, to inform or deceive, to cause hurt or bring comfort, etc. Therefore, you must choose words wisely and give attention to the content of your spoken and written messages because the only message that counts is the one understood by the hearer, regardless of the message you intended. Almost a century ago, Ogden and Richards (1923) wrote of the misunderstandings that result from people’s failures to know that the meanings they attach to words are subjective, based on their own personal experiences. We all learn to use language, a creative act that develops over time and in the context of a larger language community. Meanings vary even within these larger communities due to subgroups with unique cultures (e.g., groups based on race, religion, ethnicity, age, etc.). Therefore, in any interview setting, your verbal choices need to be sensitive and clear in order to avoid misunderstandings in meaning.

Interpersonal scholars Verderber and Verderber (2006) specify that to be more clear and reduce ambiguity you should use specific, concrete, and precise words and work to increase your vocabulary. Consider this to be part of the preparation required for a successful interview. Be familiar with terms, for example, that might be used by a particular company in a job interview, or do a search of medical vocabulary before a visit to your doctor.

Multiculturism points to the need to familiarize ourselves with different language styles and be informed about the way various cultural groups use language so that we are able to choose words that demonstrate respect and sensitivity. In a world increasing in multicultural environments, there is a need to learn to frame our verbal communication in language that is accepting of others because “words always create consequences” (Anderson & Killenberg, 2009, p. 125). Therefore, devote yourself to the work of choosing your words wisely.

Appropriate speech is incredibly important in an interview. Both parties strive to use more formal language if they are engaging with the other for the first time, demonstrating respect and acceptance by using words that are more formal as compared to interactions with familiar others. Jargon (technical terms) and slang (informal, nonstandard word usage) should be avoided to maintain understanding. Profanity and vulgar speech are not appropriate, and if you have become desensitized to these expressions because of media or other influences, be careful. Ask friends to help you “catch” and become sensitive to your use of inappropriate speech that can cause offense and be detrimental to the development of trust and respect in the interaction.

In the chapters that cover the specific types of interviews, attention will be given to the functions of language listed above along with specific suggestions for preparing the content of your verbal messages as interviewee and interviewer.
3.3 *Nonverbal communication* is extremely important as evidenced by the claims that message meaning is nonverbally transmitted in a range between 60% (Burgoon & Bacue, 2003) and 80% (Duck & McMahan, 2012). Developing nonverbal communication skill is critical but difficult because nonverbal behaviors are continuous and often not deliberate. Whereas verbal communication uses a single word at a time, we are literally bombarded with nonverbal channels (e.g., facial expressions, voice intonation and volume, gaze, gestures) simultaneously and constantly. How can we even begin to attempt to master our nonverbal behaviors? We will first list the functions of nonverbal communication and then categorize and highlight a few of the behaviors. Hopefully this short treatise will pique awareness of your own nonverbal behaviors and enable you to focus on skill development for interview settings.

*Four functions* of nonverbal communication are to: a) express emotion, b) convey interpersonal attitudes (e.g., liking, hostility, etc.), c) present the self to others/begin and regulate relationships, and d) manage conversations (Argyle, 1988; Burgoon & Bacue, 2003). Take time to consider the importance of these objectives for both an interviewer and an interviewee! Who does not want to express positive emotions and attitudes to a potential employer or client? Impressions are important as you meet the other person(s) in the interview, and you want to be aware of how your actions and physical characteristics effect the relationship and conversation.

*Categories of nonverbal elements* found commonly in communication literature (Duck & McMahan, 2012; Knapp & Hall, 2002; Trenholm & Jensen, 2013) include but are not limited to the following:

*Physical environment and personal appearance.* The arrangement of furniture, proximity of the parties, physique, height and weight, color of hair, smells (e.g., perfumed candles, cologne, body odor, etc.), artifacts (clothing, a brief case, jewelry, etc.)—all of these and other elements affect how the two parties view one another. Perceptions of power, age, physical condition, wealth are often established, rightly or wrongly by these nonverbal indicators. The phrases “dress for success” and “in your face” are grounded in these aspects of nonverbal behavior and demonstrate, for example, the need to dress appropriately and not invade another’s personal space.

*Kinesics or bodily movement.* Posture, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact and gaze, and touch all fall in this category. We communicate direction, descriptions of objects and events, interest (or not) in engaging with another, our sense of power(lessness), friendliness and warmth or hostility, anxiety—and myriads of other meanings through these silent but powerful modes of nonverbal communication.

*Vocalics (voice behavior).* Pitch, duration, volume, tone, silence, rate, inflection, and vocal fillers (“uhhumm”) are used to regulate, give feedback to the other, and indicate turn taking in a conversation. This category has to do with *how* something is said and is often referred to as *paralanguage.*

We need to reflect on the fact that nonverbal behavior produces various levels of success. Guerro and Floyd (2006) explain that “not all nonverbal behavior is communication; rather, a source must intentionally send a message and/or a receiver must interpret a message” (p. xi). Figure 3.1 shows a matrix of possible outcomes from our nonverbal behavior. Take time to consider this information.
The nonverbal behaviors of interviewee and interviewer are sometimes intentional, and sometimes unintentional, decoded accurately or inaccurately. Successful communication, miscommunication, and accidental communication are all possible outcomes, and this matrix can help you ponder the importance of nonverbal behaviors.

Nonverbal communication scholar Judith Burgoon (1980) concluded that nonverbal communication behaviors “carry more information and are more believed” than the verbal behaviors with “visual cues generally carry more weight than vocal ones” (p. 179). Therefore, take heed to how and what you communicate nonverbally.

3.3 **Listening** is an integral part of the communication process, interconnected with verbal and nonverbal communication, but it is perhaps the most understudied aspect of interpersonal communication research (see Bodie, 2011). The International Listening Association (2014) defines listening as “the process of receiving, constructing meaning from and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages.”

Sherry Turkle (2011), in her book *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, takes modern societies to task as people are increasingly complicit with artificial intelligence. She describes a research study in which a 26-year-old man, Rich, has a conversation with a robot, Kismet. As the encounter develops, Kismet is talking “over him” and Rich responds, “No, stop. No, no, no stop. Listen to me. Listen to me. I think we have something going. I think there is something between us” (p. 128). Can Kismet actually “listen” to Rich? Take the ILA definition above, and how would you answer that question? Has the man fallen prey to the allusion of a social interaction via a robot programmed to respond to given stimuli? Ponder your interview situations. What are you expecting of the other and what can s/he expect from you in terms of listening? How does a person become a competent listener?

Many people think of listening as a passive activity, accomplished quietly and cognitively while others speak, but we will approach it as an active element of the relational communication process and one that demands our attention in developing skills as interviewers and interviewees.
Active, intentional listening is hard work. It is comparable to exercise—we know we need it but are ambivalent. We are too often unwilling to devote the time and energy to listening which is somewhere between 45% and 70% of our communication activity (e.g., Duck & McMahan, 2012; Floyd, 2011; Steil, 1991). Listening is rated as one of the top ten most important skills for business effectiveness, but is still often taken for granted (Goby & Lewis, 2000).

According to communication scholars Bodie and Fitch-Hauser (2010), “research shows that competence in listening leads to more productive interactions, greater relational satisfaction, heightened academic and work success, and better healthcare provision” (p. 47). In their research on listening, Bodie and his colleagues (2012) strive to “ascertain both what competent listening is (attributes) and what competent listeners do (behaviors)” (p. 4). The results are helpful in pinpointing some attributes of listening competence: responsiveness, understanding, interest, questioning, and attentiveness. They identify competent listening behaviors (what listening does) to include such actions as “focused body language/position, head nods, extended responding, and subject appropriate responding” (p. 13).

In coming chapters we will apply specifics of this body of research, but for now, give attention to the following model. Give this conceptual drawing some careful thought. Ruminate on Fig. 3.2 and how this model of listening process applies to interviewees and interviewers.

---

**Figure 3.2. Systems model of the listening process (Imhof & Janusik, 2006)**
References


