



A Definition of Listening

In an effort to stake a claim on the larger field of listening, the Global Listening Centre sought to forward a definition of the term. This effort was led by Dr. Ray Donahue, Professor at Nagoya Gakuin University, Japan, and Chair of the Academic Global Listening Board. Included below is a first attempt at proposing a definition of listening that can provide a framework for its study.

Members of the Global Listening Centre were asked of their opinions regarding how to define listening. They were instructed to think particularly about “some broader issues so that the definition can:

- reflect a convergence of East-West and the wide range of fields while at the same time being succinct but comprehensive, an expected criterion for scientific terms;
- distinguish GLOBAL LISTENING CENTRE so as to set itself apart from other like-organizations;
- use “global” in two different but standard senses: international and holistic; and
- emphasize that listening to us means “understanding,” so as to avoid the public necessarily assuming Global Listening Centre is a “listening post” for international politics or news.

The result was the following:

Definition: The Global Listening Centre views Listening as a global, multimodal process that underlies effective interpersonal and intercultural relations. Listening is part attitude, marked by genuine respect and regard for all; part skill, enabled by specific verbal and nonverbal behaviors; and part physical, driven by a host of physiological, sensory-motor, cognitive, and affective functions. Combined, these elements shape the perceptual lenses through which humans interpret and *strive to* understand themselves, colored by each individual’s cultural background. *Global Listening* helps create conditions that allow others to confer freely and have mutual understanding. Although global listening per se does not always lead to agreement, when people are truly attentive and respectful, problems and grievances are much more likely to be dealt with collaboratively and harmoniously, thus helping to foster trusting relationships. *Global Listening* offers the means to meet needs in human relations—personal, organizational, intercultural.

Scope of Global Listening Centre: In today’s global environment, the power of listening is even more crucial. Given the immense challenges that currently face the world, only *Global Listening* seems capable of uniting humanity for the purpose of meeting these challenges. In this spirit, the Global Listening Centre hopes to provide an international forum that brings together practitioners and scholars alike, whether basic or applied in endeavor, with the aim of encouraging multidisciplinary collaboration by which to bridge the theory and practice of the study of listening as a primary medium for the understanding of our fellow human beings. Professionals are hereby invited from the various disciplines, from the physical and biological to the social and humanistic, to join us in collaborative spirit for advancing forward the listening sciences and in so doing contribute to a more peaceful and harmonious world.

Our hope is not to set “the” definition for all to follow, but instead to propose a way to view listening that is broad and inclusive. We hope others will help edit and problematize this definition.