Studies show that the average listener recalls only a little more than half of what a speaker says. By understanding and applying the following points, you can close this communication gap between speaker and listener.

Listen to acquire information and evaluate it. As you hear a speaker present ideas, you interpret them and pass judgment on them as sound or weak. Ask yourself: "Has the speaker presented enough evidence to justify these opinions? Is the evidence from reliable sources? Is the reasoning valid?"

Listen with the right attitude. To listen efficiently, you must be unbiased and cooperative. People with fixed ideas find it difficult to listen to viewpoints different from their own. They develop a mental deafness to ideas that do not sit well with them. An intelligent listener, on the other hand, is fair-minded and receptive to all ideas that are supported by convincing evidence.

Do not strongly agree or disagree with a speaker early in a talk. Withhold final judgment until the topic is developed.

Listen with attention. Concentration is hard work. We all have a tendency to listen for a few minutes, daydream for a while, and then turn our attention again to the speaker. To overcome this tendency, be aware of it and make an effort to concentrate continuously on the speaker's message.

Listen for the main ideas. Usually only a few main points are presented in a discussion, although many minor points and some digressions creep in. Listen with the purpose of discovering the central ideas and fastening attention upon them.

Listen for supporting information. A speaker should support assertions by offering evidence in the form of facts, statements of authorities, and logical reasoning. The evidence must be sufficient to justify what has been said; otherwise the assertion fails for lack of proof. Whatever is asserted without proof can be denied without proof.

Listen for faulty reasoning. In Chapter 24 you learned about faulty cause-and-effect arguments, irrelevant arguments, rationalizing, and wishful thinking.

As you listen to discussions, you may hear faulty reasoning of this sort, for this mistake is more common in oral than in written presentation.

Listen for loaded words. The use of emotionally loaded words is natural in free discussion, particularly when the speakers are committed to a viewpoint. The active listener is aware of this danger and discounts arguments that are directed at emotions, not reason.

1. From the grammar text used at St. George's.