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Can you hear me now? How noise prevents communication with others



Photo: Néstor Carrasco

No one can deny that part of what makes [Verizon's](#) "can you hear me now?" campaign so entertaining is the fact that it's true. But the idea of [noise](#) and interference is not just limited to [cell phones](#): Noise has been getting in the way of [communication](#) long before the technology was even thought about.

In communicative terms noise, or interference, refers to anything that gets in the way of a message being transmitted from a sender to a receiver and there are several ways that this can occur.

Physical noise. This type of noise is the "can you hear me now?" variety where communication is not taking place because of something that is external to the people involved in an interaction—like static on the phone or a call being dropped.

Physiological noise. Earlier this summer, I got an ear infection from the flu and as a result, I wound up with a horrible case of vertigo. During the first few days, it was so awful that I barely processed anything that was being said to me—the physiological noise of my head spinning 100 miles per hour prevented any real communication to occur.

Psychological noise. When your best friend breaks up with her beau and she doesn't hear a word that you say because she is brooding over him, psychological noise is preventing communication. Psychological noise can also refer to any biases that we have about the people we communicate with—we focus on the noise in our heads that judges others rather than what they are actually saying to us.

Semantic noise. Semantic noise has to do with the meaning behind communication and the interference that occurs when people are not on the same page with their communication. It can occur because of language barriers or the use of jargon that only people in a certain field understand.

It's important to remember that there is no way to create a noise-free world, but we can all do our best to communicate as clearly as we can—and actively listen to the people we communicate with—in order to reduce this interference in our lives.

(Source: DeVito, Joseph A. (2008). [Human Communication: The Basic Course](#). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.)

This article originally appeared on my [Interpersonal Relationships Examiner](#) page on July 17, 2009.

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Posted by Kenya McCullum at [August 30, 2010](#)

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