# Inferences

To infer means to understand something unsaid based on the evidence you find in what is said. In other words, you must listen "between the lines" to understand.

### Objectives

1. Understand implied meaning

## Listening to Infer

This topic is introduced on a large scale in the lesson [Listening Comprehension: Implicit Main Ideas](https://edtechbooks.org/advanced_mid_listening__speaking/implicit_main_ideas). The principles here are the same, but applied on a smaller scale. In this lesson, we will take this idea of implied meaning and purpose and look at how inferences may be used to better understand specific statements within a larger listening task.

An informal speaking example of this is as follows:

Wow, it's getting kind of chilly in here.

The direct meaning of this statement is simply an observation. The speaker's words could mean nothing more than this: it's cold. However, there could easily be an implied meaning here as well. Based on the context, intonation, and stress, you could infer that the person is indirectly asking you to close a window, turn the heat up, and/or offer a blanket.

Before we look at more examples, let's review the points for listening for inferences:

* listen for word choice, and notice positive or negative connotations
* listen for intonation, pausing, and stress patterns that change meaning
* listen for the secondary purpose

Going back to that informal example, you have wow and kind of that are examples of word choice. The first expresses a strong feeling, while the second hedges the complaint, probably to make it more of a polite observation that a critical one. The intonation, pausing, and stress patterns may vary from person to person and depend on the familiarity between speaker and listener. The last point of secondary purpose requires you to think about what the speaker expects the listener to do with the information. Perhaps it is just a complaint, or perhaps the speaker believes the listener can and should make a change.

Essentially, the possible answers for why the speaker said a specific statement boil down to the same reasons discussed in the lesson [Listening Comprehension: Identify Speaker's Purpose](https://edtechbooks.org/advanced_mid_listening__speaking/identify_speakers_purpose) but on a smaller scale.

* Is the speaker simply explaining something?
* Is the speaker trying to persuade me to believe in or do something?
* Is the speaker encouraging an emotional reaction?

 If you would like another explanation of making inferences about specific statements, [here is a video from the TOEFL](https://youtu.be/yHYvu-4nCpE) (Test of English as a Foreign Language) where the presenter explains how listening for inferences would work in a test environment.

### Exercise 1: Listen

Listen to this clip of an interview with former Governor of Ohio John Kasich. As you listen, look at the transcript below and think about why the interviewer said this: "I don't think you're a Republican at all."

Answer Key

* One inference you can make is that the interviewer does not think that these ideas and opinions are typical for someone in this political party.
* Another inference you could make is that since this is a comedic talk show, the interviewer said this only to make a joke so the audience would laugh.

### Exercise 2: Listen

Listen to the poem "The Hill We Climb" by Amanda Gorman which she presented at the 2021 US Presidential Inauguration. Poems are a great opportunity to make inferences because the language is more indirect.

Transcript

**Think about what the implied meaning or purpose would be in these statements.**

**and the norms and notions**  
**of what just is**  
**isn't always just-ice.**  
  
**We lay down our arms**  
**so we can reach out our arms**  
**to one another.**  
  
**It's because being American is more than a pride we inherit,**  
**it's the past we step into**  
**and how we repair it.**  
  
**For while we have our eyes on the future,**  
**history has its eyes on us.**  
  
**For there is always light,**  
**if only we're brave enough to see it.**  
**If only we're brave enough to be it.**

### Exercise 3: Partner Activity - Informal Scenarios

* With a partner, create a conversation in which one partner says a statement with an implied second meaning or purpose.
* Practice the conversation with your partner.
* Present your short conversation to the class and ask your classmates to identify the statement with an implication and infer the meaning.

### Exercise 4: Group Activity - Implicit or Explicit

* Choose a [TED Talk](https://www.ted.com/topics/politics) from this list to watch with your group.
* As you watch, listen carefully for any possible examples of implied meaning.
* If you think you hear an example, have the group pause the video and look at the transcript. Decide as a group if this statement has an implied meaning, and if so, what inference should you make? Be prepared to share your example with the class.
* If your group does not find any examples of inference, be ready to report back to the class on why you think the speaker only spoke explicitly instead of including any implied meaning or purpose.

Read this online at <https://edtechbooks.org/advanced_mid_listening__speaking/inferences>