

**BASIC TYPES OF LISTENING** As with all effective tests, designing appropriate assessment tasks in listening begins with the specification of objectives, or criteria. Those objectives may be classified in terms of several types of listening performance. Think about what you do when you listen. Literally in nanoseconds, the following processes flash through your brain: 1. You recognize speech sounds and hold a temporary "imprint" of them in short-term memory. 2. You simultaneously determine the type of speech event (monologue, interpersonal dialogue, transactional dialogue) that is being processed and attend to its context (who the speaker is, location, purpose) and the content of the message. 3. You use (bottom-up) linguistic decoding skills and/or (top-down) background schemata to bring a plausible interpretation to the message, and assign a literal and intended meaning to the utterance. 120

**CHAPTER 6 Assessing Listening** 4. In most cases (except for repetition tasks, which involve short-term memory only), you delete the exact linguistic form in which the message was originally received in favor of conceptually retaining important or relevant information in long-term memory. Each of these stages represents a potential assessment objective:

- comprehending of surface structure elements such as phonemes, words, intonation, or a grammatical category
- understanding of pragmatic context
- determining meaning of auditory input
- developing the gist, a global or comprehensive understanding

From these stages we can derive four commonly identified types of listening performance, each of which comprises a category within which to consider assessment tasks and procedures.

1. **Intensive.** Listening for perception of the components (phonemes, words, intonation, discourse markers, etc.) of a larger stretch of language.
2. **Responsive.** Listening to a relatively short stretch of language (a greeting, question, command, comprehension check, etc.) in order to make an equally short response.
3. **Selective.** Processing stretches of discourse such as short monologues for several minutes in order to "scan" for certain information. The purpose of such performance is not necessarily to look for global or general meanings, but to be able to comprehend designated information in a context of longer stretches of spoken language (such as classroom directions from a teacher, TV or radio news items, or stories).

**Assessment**