

Selective Hearing (Dichotic Listening Task)

Can you listen to two stories at once?



Once upon a time there was a little ...

It was a dark and stormy night when ...

Selective Hearing

In a dichotic listening task, one message is presented to the right ear, and one message to the left ear. In a **divided attention** experiment you are asked to try to listen to both messages at the same time. In **selective attention** experiments you try to attend to just one of the messages while blocking out the other one.

Dichotic listening research shows that it takes almost all of our attention to comprehend a spoken message. If you listen to the story in your right ear, you don't have enough attention left over to understand what is coming in your left ear.

Further reading:

Broadbent, D.E. (1954). The role of auditory localization in attention and memory span. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 47, 191-196.

Colflesh, G., & Conway, A. (2007). Individual differences in working memory capacity and divided attention in dichotic listening. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, 14, 699-703.

Hoch, L., & Tillmann, B. (2010). Laterality effects for musical structure processing: A dichotic listening study. *Neuropsychology*, 24, 661-666.

Kimura, D. (1961). Cerebral dominance and the perception of verbal stimuli. *Canadian Journal of Psychology*, 15, 156-165.