

Listening Skills

Active Listening: Art and meaning of Listening

'Active listening' means, as its name suggests, actively listening. That is fully concentrating on what is being said rather than just passively 'hearing' the message of the speaker.

Active listening involves listening with all senses. As well as giving full attention to the speaker, it is important that the 'active listener' is also 'seen' to be listening - otherwise the speaker may conclude that what they are talking about is uninteresting to the listener.

Interest can be conveyed to the speaker by using both verbal and non-verbal messages such as maintaining eye contact, nodding your head and smiling, agreeing by saying 'Yes' or simply 'Mmm hmm' to encourage them to continue. By providing this 'feedback' the person speaking will usually feel more at ease and therefore communicate more easily, openly and honestly.

What Is Effective Listening?

Effective listening is actively absorbing information given to you by a speaker, showing that you are engaged and interested, and providing feedback to the speaker so they know the message was received. Effective listeners show speakers that they have been heard and understood.

Traits of a Good Listener

- i. Listens without distractions
- ii. Keeps eyes on the speaker to communicate interest
- iii. Concentrates on what's being said
- iv. Doesn't pre-judge the message(s)
- v. Avoids interrupting
- vi. Interjects only to enhance understanding using "what" and "how" questions
- vii. Summarizes for clarity
- viii. Reads and reacts properly to emotions
- ix. Uses positive body language; head nodding, eye contact, body lean
- x. Listens for what is unsaid
- xi. Allows for silence when appropriate
- xii. Creates an atmosphere for unhurried conversation

Listening Modes

Disengaged – your body is present but your mind is not. You hear the words that the person is saying and can even repeat them but you are not really listening because your mind is on something else.

Competitive – you are listening with the intention of "topping" what the other person is saying. Whether its accomplishments, possessions or relationships, the underlying goal is to prove that you are better than the other person.

Combative – this is an argumentative mode. You listen for flaws or weaknesses in what is being said and wait for an opening to point them out. You are constantly formulating your point of view and creating comebacks that attack the speaker or their message.

Passive – you listen carefully and seek to understand. You don't ask questions or validate your understanding.

Active – you demonstrate your interest in what the speaker thinks, feels or means in their message. You restate what you hear to reflect the message back to the speaker for validation. The validation is what makes this the most effective listening mode and distinguishes it from all the other modes.

Listening and NOTE TAKING

Why do we take notes?

- To summarize
- To highlight important information
- Most importantly, to review and study later

What should be included?

- **Pertinent information** – What subject/chapter are you covering in class that day? Look on your syllabus. Any information that is presented and pertains to that area is pertinent information.
- **Valid information** – Before including information in notes, it is important to determine if the information is accurate and based on fact.
- **Questions you have** – These include questions you have about things you don't understand and the topics that you need clarification on later. Perhaps they may even include questions about how the point pertains to the subject.
- **Ideas** - Write down ideas that you come up with during discussion in class, from points read in the text, or even ideas for an upcoming paper or essay exam.
- **Verbal clues** – These may include clues from the professor about future exams, or future implications of the material on concepts you will study later.
- **Points to study later** - Included can be ideas/concepts you need more review to grasp or points the professor indicated will be covered on the exam.
- **Know the source** (lecturer, author, etc.) - Knowing the lecturer can help pinpoint important information or highly testable material..
- **Tangents/Examples** – It may appear that your professor is off subject, but more than likely examples and real case scenarios will be given. It is important to discern between examples that illustrate points of importance and tangents that will not contribute to your understanding of the course material.
- **Specific order** – Follow the book or at least chapter order. This allows for a logical flow of information in your notes.
- **Handouts** – These are always important tools to supplement lecture. Test questions often come off handouts; otherwise, they would be a waste of a professor's time

Types of Listening

- **Appreciative listening:** This is listening for deriving aesthetic pleasure, as we do when we listen to a comedian, musician, or entertainer
- **Empathetic listening:** When we listen to a distressed friend who wants to vent his feelings, we provide emotional and moral support in the form of empathetic listening. When psychiatrists listen to their patients, their listening is classified as empathetic listening
- **Comprehensive listening:** This type of listening is needed in the class room when students have to listen to the lecturer to understand and comprehend the message. Similarly, when someone is giving you directions to find the location of a place, comprehensive listening is required to receive and interpret the message.
- **Critical listening:** When the purpose is to accept or reject the message or to evaluate it critically, one requires this type of listening.
 - For example
 - Listening to a sales person before making a purchase order
 - listening to politicians making their election campaign speech involves critical listening
 - Similarly, when you read a book with the objective of writing a book review, you use your critical abilities.

