

Listening Habits

Less-skilled Listeners	Skilled Listeners
1. Immediately evaluate what is being said.	1. Suspend judgment and listen.
2. Spend time rehearsing what they will say next	2. Focus on what the other is saying.
3. Try to steer the conversation towards the direction they want.	3. Let the other person direct the conversation.
4. Hear everything through their own frame of reference.	4. Try to enter the other's frame of reference.
5. Only ask questions when the other seems to need help.	5. Ask questions to satisfy their own curiosity or interests.
6. Disagree with other's point of view.	6. Seek to understand other's perspective.
7. Try to take in and respond to everything.	7. Sort for main ideas.
8. Allow their mind to wander to other things.	8. Keep focused on the other and what they are saying.
9. Parrot back exactly what they heard.	9. Reflect back the essence and feeling of what was said.
10. Give little verbal and non-verbal response.	10. Actively encourage speaker through verbal and non-verbal cues.

Active Listening Skills

1. Attending

This consists of postural, visual and nonverbal indicators that show you are really paying attention to the other person. Three specific behavioral skill elements are characteristic of "attending":

- A. Physical body posture, such as leaning forward in an open, accepting neutral position (such as arms uncrossed). When sitting "bold upright" in a chair, legs and arms crossed, one displays the exact opposite of attending.
- B. Eye contact is critical, since when you look away from the person who is talking, you are not displaying attending behavior. This doesn't mean you should "stare down" the other person, just that you must regularly let your eyes make contact.
- C. Some vocal (but nonverbal) expressions encourage the other person to keep talking—things like a nod of your head, a smile, or saying "Um-hmm." These expressions show the other person that you want to hear more. We all know how to be attentive, but we are often lazy or sloppy about doing so.

2. Active Listening

This group of skill elements is much less common than attending and has three sub-skills:

- A. Simple repetition is used only to clarify what you did not hear—the signal—or are not sure you heard correctly. This is as far as most people go with listening skill, and *it is not adequate*.
- B. Paraphrasing, or repeating in your own words what the other person said, is a more effective strategy for clarification. This lets you determine whether or not you correctly interpreted the meaning of what the other person said. Correct paraphrasing requires more active involvement in the listening process than simple repetition, but it is a skill that is relatively easy to learn.
- C. The most difficult skill element is listening for feelings and restating the feeling that the other person has expressed. This skill is difficult to develop for two reasons: First, you must restate the feeling that the other is experiencing in your own words; not just repeat the term the other person used. Second, (and more frequently) you must often figure out just what the other person's feeling is. Most people communicate their emotion non-verbally. This is inadequate in helping to solve the problem.