

Academic Advisement Center

Effective Listening Skills

A good listener is not just a silent receptacle, passively receiving the thoughts and feelings of others. To be an effective listener, you must respond with verbal and nonverbal cues which let the speaker know -- actually prove -- that you are listening and understanding. These responses are called feedback.

Verbal feedback works best when delivered in the form of brief statements, rather than questions. Statements allow you to paraphrase and reflect what you've heard, which affirms the speaker's success at communicating and encourages the speaker to elaborate further or delve more deeply into the topic. Meaningful exchanges are built on feedback.

In order to accurately feed back a person's thoughts and feelings, you have to be consciously, actively engaged in the process of listening.

Listening In The Classroom:

- Develop a consumer-wise and positive attitude. You are taking that class for some reason and therefore you have an investment at stake. Make the most of your investment, to benefit from that class.
- Sit near the front of the class where you can easily see and hear the teacher. Sitting near the teacher allows you to focus more closely. It also gives the teacher the opportunity to more easily get feedback from you, and you'll have incentive to stay awake.
- Review previous class notes, assignments, and texts *before* you go to class. This will help you understand how the day's lecture relates to previous material and assigned readings. You will also have a better understanding of the material, and this will enable you to ask thoughtful questions for clarification (professors will certainly appreciate this!).
- Be aware of what your mind is doing and be alert. This takes practice, but you will benefit if you learn to bring your mind back to the classroom. Staying alert is not always easy, so avoid eating heavy meals before class, wear comfortable clothing, and constantly monitor your focus of attention.
- Use an efficient note taking system. Not only will this help keep you awake and organized, but your efforts will pay off when you study for exams and quizzes later.
- Ask questions to help you clarify concepts and to get you actively involved in the learning process.
- Focus on the content of what the teacher says, not the delivery.
- Listen for the main points of the lecture and try to determine future test questions.
- Be responsive. Put some energy into your listening, and your teachers may have more energy and enthusiasm as well.
- Since you can think faster than the speaker can talk, take advantage of the speed of thought and mentally summarize main points, look for underlying assumptions, anticipate what is coming, evaluate the evidence that is being given, and compare and contrast the ideas with your knowledge. This is active, critical listening.

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