



Active Listening: Skill-Building Strategies and Self-Assessment

What to do: Review these active listening tips and strategies. Then work with program staff and students to practice these strategies and build your skills.

Why it matters: Developing a program culture that values active listening can increase students' comprehension, build self-regulation skills, and increase awareness of others' feelings and opinions.

Tips for Improving Active Listening Skills

1. **Look at the person** — their eyes, mouth, and expressions. Remove all distractions, such as phones or other materials, that are likely to take attention away from the speaker.
2. **Listen not only to the speaker's words** but the information and content they are sharing: Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?
3. Recognize the **difference between hearing and listening**:
 - Both involve using our ears, but hearing does not need our direct attention.
 - Listening requires *intention* on the part of the listener. For example, when we listen carefully to a song intending to learn the words, we can learn to sing it from memory.
 - Listening is processing sounds to understand the meaning behind them. Our brains must figure out how the sounds form words or sentences that we can understand.
 - To understand what another person is talking about, we must listen with *intention* and for a *purpose*.
4. **Restate or paraphrase** in your own words what the speaker said. For example, "So what you're saying is, when I'm solving a math word problem, I should first read the entire problem and talk to myself about what it means. Then, I create my own visual model of the problem."
5. **Ask clarifying questions.** These are simple questions of fact. The instructor needs to model this practice for students since young people may not have experience asking these types of questions. Some examples of clarifying questions are:
 - Is this why you said ...? Did I restate or paraphrase what you said correctly?
 - What resources should I use to begin?
 - Did I hear you say ...?
 - Did I understand you when you said ...?
 - Did I hear you correctly when you said ...?
6. **Be mindful of your own feelings and opinions** and those of the person speaking. Pay attention to facial expressions, body language, and movement to help you understand what the speaker is trying to convey.

Many students mistakenly believe that listening is simply not talking while others speak. Listening involves much more. It's an active process that requires not only hearing but also comprehending and interpreting ideas.



7. **Practice!** Provide two students with a familiar topic and ask them to engage in a conversation while the others watch. During the conversation, pause and ask each student to “think aloud” — to say aloud what they are thinking, hearing, and understanding by restating, paraphrasing, and asking clarification questions.
8. **Incorporate listening skills in your everyday activities.** You can ask students to listen as you share procedures and expectations related to your homework help or tutoring session, for example. While listening, encourage students to take notes, draw quick sketches, and tell you what they heard, what they understood, and any thinking or questions that came about from what you said.

Active Listening Self-Assessment

Using the chart below, conduct a debrief session after you’ve instructed students on improving their listening skills. Have them perform this self-assessment to determine how well they listened.

Did you ...?	How well did you do it? 1 – Very well 2 – Well 3 – Not so well
1. Look at the person, their eyes, mouth, and expressions? Remove all distractions such as phone or other materials that were likely to take your attention away from the speaker?	
2. Listen not only to the words but the content? <i>Who? What? Where? Why? When? How?</i>	
3. Restate or paraphrase what the person said in your own words?	
4. Ask clarifying questions?	
5. Pay attention and stay mindful of your own feelings, expressions, and opinions?	
Reflect: I will work on...	

This resource was developed in 2024 by the Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) National Technical Assistance Center (NTAC), funded under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education (Department) and administered by Synergy Enterprises, Inc. under Cooperative Agreement No. 287E230009 with the Department’s Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Department, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the Department or the federal government. This resource is in the public domain and is available at 21stcclcntac.org. Authorization to reproduce it in whole or in part is granted.

