Active Listening

Being thoughtful about the reason for listening and using proven listening strategies before, during, and after the listening experience to get more out of presentations

Key Method

A well-researched, six-part active listening model can be applied to different types of listening goals, improving the effectiveness, efficiency, and learning power of the listening process.

Method Components

During an activity, students engage in and demonstrate the six listening strategies. Students analyze and reflect on the results of these strategies to determine lessons learned. Analysis and reflection can be done individually, in small groups, or during whole-group instruction.

The six listening strategies

- **Prepare before listening**: Do some research on the speaker’s topic and background and note any questions or ideas you find especially interesting that you’d like the speaker to address.
- **Focus intently on the speaker**: Give full attention, looking directly at the speaker, watching body language, and listening to both the words and the feelings of what is being said; respond with appropriate facial gestures (smile, nod) or quiet affirmations ("yes," “uh-huh,” “hmmm,” “I see”) to reflect your engagement with the speaker.
- **Restate and ask clarifying questions**: If you think you and others may benefit from some clarification about what is being said, and if it is appropriate, when there is a pause in the presentation, briefly restate what you thought you heard and then ask a clarifying question.
- **Reflect on your own thoughts and feelings**: Think about what the speaker has presented before you make a comment or ask a question; take notes or jot down your thoughts to help clarify your own thinking.
- **Make a comment or ask a question**: At the appropriate time—generally when there is a pause in the presentation—offer a comment or question that can either introduce a new point or add to what the speaker has presented.
- **Summarize your learning and show appreciation to the speaker**: Make a short summary comment, if appropriate, or record your “takeaways” or “lessons learned.”

Example activity for practicing and reflecting on the listening strategies

- In small groups, students listen to a short student or teacher presentation and practice the six strategies. (A checklist can be used that asks each student to rate how well he or she personally and the group as a whole applied the strategies.)
- In the same small groups, students discuss how well each person and the group applied the listening strategies and what could be done better the next time.

Suggested preparation

- Students think about why they listen—what they want to get out of listening—and list three types of listening (e.g., listening for information, for developing a relationship, for appreciating the speaker, for
critical analysis or debate, for relaxation; see
http://changingminds.org/techniques/listening/all_types_listening.htm for more types). Then they share items from their lists with the whole group and create a master class list of types of listening.

- Students choose one or two types of listening and list strategies that are effective and those that are not in trying to achieve different listening goals. They organize their list in a three-column chart (Listening Goals, Good Strategies, Bad Strategies) that they then present to the group.

**Supporting Research**

Research on effective and active listening for learning suggests a number of proven strategies that can help maximize the listening experience, especially if the listening strategies match the goals and the type of listening the listener has chosen.

- On the Importance of Listening Comprehension, Hogan et al., http://www.amazon.com/Listening-Research-Resources-Language-Teaching/dp/1408296853
- Thumbs Up! Signals to Encourage Active Listening (video), Teaching Channel https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/teaching-strategy-active-listening

**Resources**

**Submission Guidelines & Evaluation Criteria**

Following are the items you must submit to earn this micro-credential and the criteria by which they will be evaluated. To earn the micro-credential, you must receive a passing evaluation for Parts 1, 3, and 4 and a “Yes” for Part 2.

**Part 1. Overview questions**
(200-word limit for each response)

- **Activity Description:** What kind of project activities did you and your students engage in to become more proficient in active listening? Please describe the learning activities and strategies you used.
  - **Passing:** Activity description is clear with sufficient detail to know what the students did to gain competencies.

- **Activity Evaluation:** How do you know your students increased their proficiency in active listening by engaging in the activities, and what evidence did you collect that demonstrates these learning gains?
  - **Passing:** Activity evaluation process and evidence are clear, appropriate, and sufficient to evaluate the competencies.

**Part 2. Evidence/artifacts**

Please submit work examples from two students (writing, audio, images, video, or other products) that demonstrate progress toward the Active Listening competency, including such items as sample listening goals.
and strategies charts, audio or video evidence of student listening and speaker questioning strategies, examples of listening notes or reflections, or other relevant items.

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>&quot;Yes&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;Almost&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;Not Yet&quot;</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student work</td>
<td>clearly demonstrates learning from applying active listening strategies through:</td>
<td>Student work demonstrates learning from the active listening steps and strategies through examples of individual and group commentary and critiques of the effective listening process, but few examples of discussions and evaluations of how listening skills improved or the value of the lessons learned</td>
<td>Student work shows some learning from the active listening process steps, with a few examples of how focused listening skills improved learning but few examples of group discussions and critiques and no examples of student evaluations of the lessons learned from the listening activities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1. Many examples of the ways the strategies were used to improve focus, questioning, commenting, and overall engagement</td>
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<td>2. Convincing evidence of the effectiveness of the listening strategies in clarifying the goals and techniques to get the most out of listening</td>
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<td>3. Many examples of productive individual or group analyses and discussions that increased understanding of effective listening</td>
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<td>4. Individual and group evaluations of the listening results, process, and lessons learned</td>
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**Part 3. Student reflections**

For the two students whose work examples were included above, submit their student-created reflections on the Active Listening activities they experienced. Use the following questions as guidance (200-word limit for each reflection):

- How did the active listening activities help you focus on both the content and the feelings of what was presented and to reflect on your own thinking before commenting or asking questions?
- How did the active listening strategies change your view of the value of specific feedback, revision, and reflection in writing and in learning in general?
  - **Passing:** Student reflections clearly indicate how the Active Listening activities helped them focus on the meaning, feelings, and personal thinking, and clearly discuss how the activities changed the student’s views on the value of using listening strategies to improve learning. The reflections are specific and convincing.

**Part 4. Teacher reflection**

Provide a reflection on what you learned, using the following questions as guidance (200-word limit):

- What was the impact of engaging your students in the Active Listening activity?
- How will experiencing these project activities shape your daily future teaching practice?
  - **Passing:** Teacher reflections clearly indicate how the activity affected both the students and the teacher, and clearly state how the experience will affect the teacher’s future practice. The reflections are specific and convincing.