



How to become a better listener?



Listening is often something that we take for granted. It is common that people often hear what is being said but hearing is very different to listening.

Listening is important in enhancing your ability to understand and make you a better communicator. There are many techniques that can be used to become a better listener.

Having the ability to interpret a person's body language and with the use of active listening, can help the listener develop a more accurate understanding of the speaker's message by earning the trust of others and helping you to fully understand the person's situation.

Active listening

The technique of careful listening and the observation of non-verbal cues, with feedback in the form of accurate paraphrasing. It is generally used in counselling, training, and solving disputes or conflicts. The listener will pay attention, understand, respond and remember what is being said in the context of intonation, timing, and non-verbal cues also known as body language. This is very different to other listening techniques.

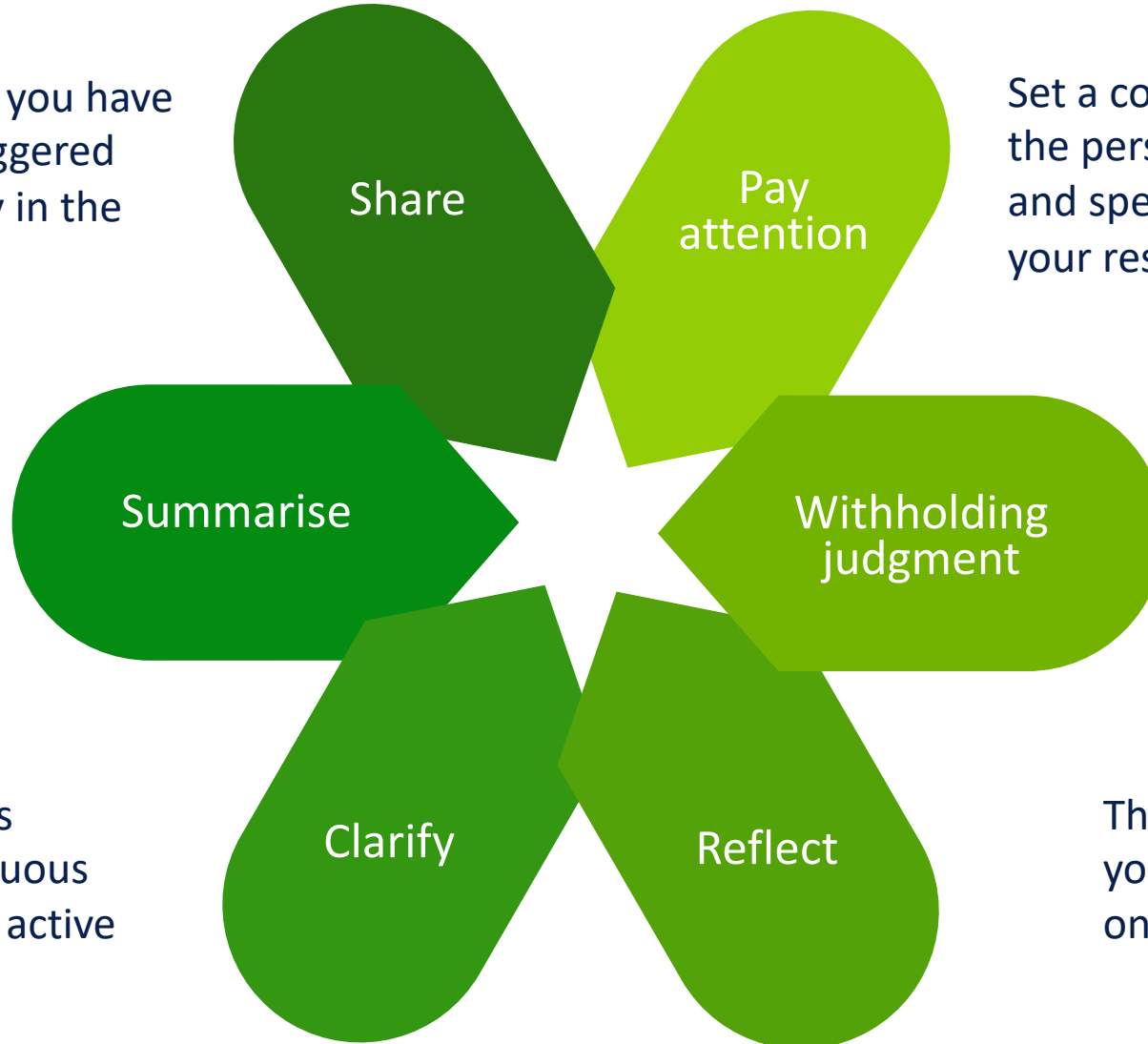


How to become a better listener?

Talk about a similar experience you have had. Share an idea that was triggered by a comment made previously in the conversation.

Summarise what you have understood while practicing active listening. Ask the other person to do the same.

Don't be shy to ask questions about any issue that's ambiguous or unclear when engaging in active listening.



Set a comfortable tone that gives the person an opportunity to think and speak. Allow time before your response.

Having the ability to have an open mind and be open to new ideas.

This technique indicates that you and your counterpart are on the same page.



LISTEN

L	Look and get interested
I	Involve yourself by responding
S	Stay on target
T	Test you understand
E	Evaluate the message
N	Neutralise your feelings



AFFORD TO LISTEN

A	ATTENTION – Give your full attention
F	FOCUS – Focus on what is being said
F	FEELINGS – Identify the feeling in the message
O	OBSERVE – Watch the body language
R	RESTATE – Reinforce by rephrasing the message
D	DETERMINE – Verify you understand

**Using Kinesics, Paralinguistics & Proxemics
to help you become a better listener**

Kinesics

Kinesics is all about communication through body movements, such as gestures and facial expressions. It is about non-verbal behaviour using any part of the body.

Kinesics can be broken into 5 categories –

Emblems

Non-verbal signals that can generally be translated into words. The OK symbol is a good example of this.

Regulators

Regulators are non-verbal messages that accompany speech to control or regulate what the speaker is saying. Nodding is a good example of this.

Illustrators

Illustrators are movements that complement verbal communication by describing or accenting or reinforcing what the speaker is saying. Pointing at an object is a good example of this.

Affect Displays

Affect displays are nonverbal displays of the body or face that carry an emotional meaning or display affective states. Slouching, shuffling and facial expressions are good examples, i.e. smiling suggesting happiness.

Paralinguistics

Paralinguistic communication is the study of voice and how words are said. When we open our mouth to speak, we reveal much about ourselves that often have nothing at all to do with the words we are speaking.

Common paralinguistics cues and examples –

Speed

Try speaking at a rate or speed similar to the person you are communicating with. Rapid rates of speech have been correlated with composure and self-assurance.

Rhythm

All languages have different rhythms. Try to match the rhythm of your speech to the slowest speaking person, it will make it easier to communicate and connect.

Pitch

Lower pitched voices are considered more credible and mature. Never try to force your voice so low that you lose vocal power.

Infection

This refers to variations in pitch. A monotone speaker can make people feel tired. An easy way to ensure your voice is never boring or monotonous is to do daily warmups, maybe singing.

Quality

This refers to the vocal characteristics that allow us to differentiate one voice from another i.e. Throaty, flat harsh. You could record yourself to get a better idea of what you sound like and ask other people you trust for their opinion on your vocal quality.

Tone

Tone can reveal emotions, passion and commitment behind the words being spoken. You can establish great vocal rapport when you match or mirror vocal characteristics as long as it doesn't come across as mockery.

Proxemics

This is the study of how humans use space when we are communicating. How close we stand to someone, whether we touch them, and how comfortable we feel are all part of the study of proxemic.

There are four kinds of distance that people generally use in communication –

Public space is the space that characterises how close we sit or stand to someone, like a public figure or public speaker. So, if you are at an event listening to a lecture, you are probably about 12 - 25 feet away.

Social space means we're getting a little closer, about 4 - 12 feet away. This is the kind of space you're probably in if you're talking to a colleague at work.

Personal space is even closer. In this case, you're probably about 1 - 4 feet away from someone. This is reserved for talking to friends or family.

Intimate space is for people who you are very close to. In this case, you're probably less than a foot away and you might even be touching the other person i.e. this is the space you're in with a romantic partner.

One thing to consider when determining how much space an individual needs is to recognise that the distance is chosen by individuals based on factors like prior experience, cultural background, and the kind of relationship they have with a person. An example of this is, an individual might be comfortable being very close to a romantic partner but may lean away when someone else gets too close. Being attentive to a person's boundary can help give us a clue about a person's personal preference for distance.

“The actual distance between public, social, personal, and intimate space is rooted in overall culture. However, these spaces are relative. In Western culture, we tend to have a sense of really large personal space.”

– Beck Johnson, Senior Research Specialist at Haworth

In summary

Kinesics



The interpretation of body motion communication such as facial expressions and gestures, nonverbal behaviour related to movement of any part of the body or the body as a whole.



Paralinguistics



The study of the tone of words also known as vocalics These aspects of language include the higher volume used in conversation, the use of silence, hesitations or pauses, rate of speech, inflections, and expressiveness



Proxemics



The study of physical distance and posture between speakers. The four zones include the intimate zone (physical contact to 18 inches). Personal space (between 1 and 4 feet). Social space (between 4 to 12 feet) and finally public distance (typically 12 feet and above).



Active listening takes time and practice

Remove distractions –

- ✓ Turn your phone off
- ✓ Close down your computer screen
- ✓ Pick a quiet, calm environment

Ask Questions-

- ✓ Open ended questions – This allows the speaker to have more than a yes-or-no answer which will provide a more personalised answer.
- ✓ Direct question - A direct question is a question that can be answered (i.e., it is not a statement) and always ends in a question mark.

Share experiences-

- ✓ Sharing your own personal experiences with a speaker can help them to open up with you during a conversation and help build trust.

Start Active Listening today to become a better communicator

Remember –

- ✓ Pay attention.
- ✓ Show that you're listening.
- ✓ Provide feedback.
- ✓ Defer judgment.
- ✓ Respond appropriately.



**Helping you to become
a better listener**