

Appendix D: Active Listening developed by B. Luby

Active listening is a key component of relationship building. It requires listeners to focus on the speaker, attend to the speaker’s body language, listen for underlying messages (e.g., emotion), ask clarifying questions as required, and paraphrase to confirm understanding (Toiter, 2020). Active listening refers to the act of “purposefully focusing on what a speaker is saying with the objective of understanding” (Shier, n.d.).

Indeed, active listeners can glean more accurate information through their conversations. They are also able to deepen their connections with others. A speaker who feels heard feels respected. By contrast, a failure to listen effectively can make the speaker feel “unimportant, not heard, [and] not respected” (Clark, 2018). When individuals fail to listen, they risk alienating the speaker (Clark, 2018). Educators looking to build and sustain community-focused or community-engaged learning activities outside of the classroom have a responsibility to teach active listening skills as a form of harm reduction.

Students can be encouraged to adopt a listening mindset through community-focused learning and critical reflection activities. According to communication coach Dorie Clark, a listening mindset is “[a] state of mind where you strive to understand your motivation to listen, show the other person you care, stay focused on the real problem or issue, and keep your curiosity active throughout the conversation” (Clark, 2018). A low touch activity that can be used to develop active listening skills within the classroom is a note-taking assignment (see Appendix E). In this assignment, students assume responsibility for capturing and posting key content from the lecture for their classmates. Students are motivated to listen to ensure their classroom community has accurate and reliable study notes.

Note: Students who are registered with accessibility services may require additional time and/or permission to record the lecture to ensure the successful completion of the note-taking activity. It is important to remind all notetakers to complete background readings before class as “making associations to past remembered information can help a listener understand what [they are] currently hearing” (Syrett, n.d.) Background readings can thus help to reduce performance anxiety while improving students’ ability to prioritize information.

Reflection activities can also be introduced to students to encourage the development of active listening skills. For example, after a meeting, seminar, or guest speaker, educators can prompt students to complete the following checklist (adapted from Toister, 2020):

ACTIVE LISTENING CHECKLIST	NOTES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Eliminated distractions to improve focus<input type="checkbox"/> Concentrated on the speaker<input type="checkbox"/> Attended to the speaker’s body language and/or emotional cues<input type="checkbox"/> Asked clarifying questions as needed<input type="checkbox"/> Paraphrased to confirm understanding	

By reflecting on their listening behaviours, students begin to understand what influences their ability to “tune in” and can position themselves to build stronger, healthier relationships inside and outside of the classroom.

Note: Body language can have cultural inflections. To listen effectively, students may also be required to develop intercultural competencies. According to the [EdCan Network](#), “[d]eveloping intercultural competence involves systemically observing and critically reflecting on our own . . . behaviours.” Students operating in a diverse environment are encouraged to:

1. Question their attitudes by asking questions like “Am I curious, open and eager to learn [?] How do I react when I don’t understand what [someone is] doing or saying?”
2. Develop cultural self-awareness by asking “Am I aware of my own cultural behaviour and why I think and act the way I do? Am I aware of how [others] wish to be treated? Which rules, customs, and values influence my own [and others’] thinking, actions, and communication?”
3. Observe and respond to situations by asking “Do I respond in a culturally appropriate manner?”