

Improve Listening Skills

Prepared By Jim Messina, Ph.D., CCMHC, NCC, DCMHS

Assistant Professor, Troy University Tampa Bay Site

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What are three types of effective listening? #1. Paraphrasing

To **paraphrase**, one simply rewords what another individual has said.

For example:

The speaker might say, *She was foolish to quit her job.*

The listener might respond, *I hear you saying that you believe she shouldn't have quit.*

What has occurred is paraphrasing where the listener has clarified what the speaker has said.

Example Paraphrase: Restating what another person has said in your own words.

Speaker: *It just wasn't the right thing for him to do.*

Listener: *You believe he shouldn't have done that*

What are three types of effective listening? # 2. Open Questions

An **open question** explores a person's statement without requiring a simple *yes* or *no* answer. The basic difference between an open question and a closed question is what they provide the person being asked. When you are asked an open question it helps you think more about an issue. A closed question will not do that. It may force you to answer before you are ready, or require a *yes* or *no* answer that doesn't allow more thinking about the issue. Closed questions close the door on further thought, while open questions open the door.

For example:

The speaker might say: *I don't like my job.*

The listener might respond: *What about your job don't you like?* or, *Tell me more about your feelings regarding your job.*

Example Open Question: A question that helps a person explore his/her feelings (rather than forcing a *yes*, *no*, or other certain answer).

Speaker: *I didn't like that show.*

Listener: *What didn't you like about it?*

What are three types of effective listening? # 3. Feelings Reflection

Feelings reflection is a response in which you express a feeling or emotion you have experienced in reference to a particular statement.

For example:

The speaker might say: *I get sick of working so much overtime!*

The listener might respond: *I hear you feeling angry and resentful at being asked to work so much overtime.*

Feeling reflections are perhaps the most difficult active listening responses to make. Not only do you actively listen to what is being said but also you actively listen for what is being felt. When you make a feeling reflection, you are reflecting back what you hear of another's feelings. It is similar to paraphrasing; however, you repeat what you heard them feeling instead of what you heard them saying. To understand what individuals are feeling, you must listen to their words, to their tone of voice, and watch their body signals. By observing all three you can begin to guess their feelings.

Example Feeling Reflection: your perception of the speaker's feelings based on words, tone, and body language.

Speaker: *I can't stand to be kept waiting!*

Listener: *You're pacing the floor and your tone of voice tells me you feel this is an abuse of your time.*

How can listening skills be improved?

- Listen carefully so that you will be able to understand, comprehend, and evaluate. Careful listening will require a conscious effort on your part. You must be aware of the verbal and nonverbal messages (reading between the lines).
- Be mentally and physically prepared to listen. Put other thoughts out of your mind. Your attention will be diverted from listening if you try to think of answers in advance.
- You can't hear if YOU do all the talking. Don't talk too much.
- Think about the topic in advance, if possible. Be prepared to listen.
- Listen with empathy. See the situation from the other's point of view. Try to put yourself in their shoes.
- Be courteous; don't interrupt. Take notes if you worry about forgetting a particular point.
- Avoid stereotyping individuals by making assumptions about how you expect them to act. This will bias your listening.
- Listen to how something is said. Be alert for what is left unsaid.
- Make certain everyone involved gets an opportunity to voice their opinions. Don't let one person dominate the conversation.
- Face those you are talking with, lean slightly forward, and make eye contact. Use your body position and movements to show your interest, concern.

What are Roadblocks to Effective Listening?

The following types of responses indicate ineffective listening:

- Warning. Interrogating. Preaching. Ordering.
- Judging. Diverting. Analyzing. Blaming.
- Labeling. Moralizing. Probing. Ridiculing.
- Threatening. Reassuring. Distracting. Sympathizing.
- Demanding. Interpreting. Teaching. Withdrawing.
- Giving solutions. Scolding. Praising. Advising.
- Criticizing. Directing. Lecturing. Name-calling.

Reasons for Improving Listening Skills

- To avoid saying the wrong thing, being tactless.
- To dissipate strong feelings.
- To learn to accept feelings (yours and others).
- To generate a feeling of caring.
- To help people start listening to you.
- To increase the other person's confidence in you.
- To make the other person feel important and recognized.
- To be sure you both are on the same wavelength.
- To be sure you both are focused on the same topic.
- To check that you both are on target.

