

Core Capabilities Learning Strand – Listening Self-Assessment [2]

Instructions: The purpose of this activity is to help you learn about what you need to be a good listener and create an action plan for self-improvement in your listening skills. Select one of the boxes to the right of each item, depending on how you see yourself today. No one will see your ratings unless you share them, so please be honest with yourself.

LISTENING BEHAVIOUR		ALWAYS	FREQUENTLY	SOMETIMES	RARELY	NEVER
When another person is speaking to me, I ...						
1.	Focus on the speaker as much as possible.					
2.	Concentrate on content of the message.					
3.	Anticipate what the speaker is going to say.					
4.	Establish eye contact with the speaker.					
5.	Keep listening even if I disagree with the speaker.					
6.	Nod, smile, or give other non-verbal cues.					
7.	Plan my response in my head.					
8.	Get distracted by environmental sounds.					
9.	Take notes, if necessary, to help me remember.					
10.	Listen without judging or critiquing.					
11.	Interrupt the speaker before she or he is done.					
12.	Think about issues unrelated to the topic.					
13.	Pay attention to the speaker's non-verbal communication.					
14.	Restate the speaker's message in my own words.					
15.	Adapt my response to fit the situation.					
16.	Can differentiate between fact and opinion.					
17.	Look like I'm listening when I'm not.					
18.	Ask questions to gain clarity about the message.					
19.	React emotionally to the speaker's message.					
20.	Consider how the speaker may react to my response.					
21.	Clarify meanings of the speaker's words if I'm unsure about their definitions.					
22.	Allow the speaker to vent his or her frustration.					
23.	Think of different views on the topic.					
24.	Display an open and caring posture.					
25.	Create a non-threatening environment.					

Analysis: If you responded “ALWAYS”, “FREQUENTLY”, or “SOMETIMES” for items 3, 7, 8, 11, 12, 17, or 19, these may be areas in which you need to improve your listening skills, especially your focus on the speaker and how you filter information. You may also wish to address any of the remaining statements if you responded with “SOMETIMES”, “RARELY”, or “NEVER”, particularly for items 5, 6, 13, 14, 15, 20 and 23, which directly relate to providing feedback to the speaker effectively during a conversation.

Study this information and the following pages to see why these 25 behaviours are important to be a good listener and then outline an action plan for self-improvement on the last page.

Make sure it is a *realistic* plan to which you can fully commit yourself.

Why These Behaviours Are Important

The 25 behaviours that comprise this assessment are of particular importance if you would like to improve your listening skills. They represent areas you may need to address to become a more effective listener. Some of the behaviours, both negative and positive, warrant additional attention.

- **Concentrate on content of the message.** If you are concentrating more on the speaker’s physical appearance, you may miss the speaker’s message and meaning completely.
- **Anticipate what the speaker is going to say.** This is a common behaviour among listeners and one that some may find difficult to correct. It may help to keep an open mind about what the speaker is saying and focus on the conversation.
- **Establish eye contact with the speaker.** Good eye contact will signal to the speaker that you are ready to listen and will help you focus on the message. It also helps you read the emotions of the speaker to gauge your response.
- **Nod, smile, or give other non-verbal cues.** Positive non-verbal communication shows the speaker that you are paying attention and encourages him or her to continue to share information. This behaviour will also help you remain focussed.
- **Plan a response.** This is another behaviour that many people engage in, whether they realise it or not. Since it may be difficult to correct, it’s important to catch yourself if doing it so you can focus on the speaker and fully comprehend the meaning of the message.
- **Get distracted by environmental sounds.** When we allow external noise to interfere with our ability to listen, it will be harder to understand the speaker’s message. It will also signal to the speaker that what he or she has to say isn’t important to you.
- **Listen without judging or critiquing.** To be an effective listener, it is important that we take in a speaker’s message without rushing to judgement or criticising her or his views. Otherwise, the focus changes to you as the listener. This may harm your relationship with the speaker and interfere with understanding the message.

- **Interrupt the speaker before she or he is done.** Sometimes we are so concerned with our comments, opinions, or responses that we interrupt while the speaker is still talking. Make a conscious effort to stop doing this. It will greatly enhance your ability to listen and will help the speaker communicate her or his thoughts more effectively as well.
- **Think about issues unrelated to the topic.** Daydreaming or just thinking about other issues while someone is speaking can inhibit our listening ability, which can lead to misunderstanding or missing vital information.
- **Pay attention to the speaker's non-verbal communication.** Notice the speaker's facial expression, tone of voice, gestures, and posture to read his or her emotions more effectively and respond accordingly. If we ignore the speaker's body language, we risk alienating him or her with an inappropriate reply.
- **Restate the speaker's message in your own words.** While it may take some practice, this behaviour effectively signals to the speaker that you understand the message. It also helps you gain clarity to provide an appropriate response.
- **Differentiate between fact and opinion.** This helps ensure that you are not allowing your response to be clouded by generalisations or false information which, in turn, may help the speaker view the situation with a new perspective.
- **React emotionally to the speaker's message.** A speaker may find this behaviour offensive and may be unwilling to share information with the listener in the future. This may affect the relationship with the speaker and interfere with understanding the speaker's message or view.
- **Allow the speaker to vent his or her frustrations.** In many situations, a speaker just wants to get some things off her or his chest. A good listener allows this to happen on occasion. It also shows empathy toward the speaker and a willingness to help. Keep in mind that it is usually beneficial to suggest problem-solving after a while rather than to dwell on the negative.
- **Create a non-threatening environment.** A relaxing environment encourages the speaker to share information, and it will also help the listener focus on the speaker and be more open to the message. This establishes a positive relationship with the speaker and leads to greater problem-solving.

Plan for Self-Improvement

- 1.** Which two or three listening behaviours need the most improvement?
- 2.** What steps can you take to improve these behaviours?
- 3.** What are the first two or three steps you will take?
- 4.** How will you measure your results and know you are improving your listening skills?
- 5.** How will you personally benefit from improving your listening skills?

6. What support do you need from others that will help you to improve?

7. Who needs to know you are working to improve your listening skills?

8. How will you share this information with her or him?

9. Which behaviours are particularly important for your work life? Which are important for your home life?

10. By when would you hope to see noticeable improvement in your listening skills?