

Strategies for listening online

This document has been collaboratively constructed by the author, online teachers within TAFENSW (undertaking the Graduate Certificate in Facilitating and managing eLearning (FAMe)) and participants at NetWorking2002.

Question - How in an online environment can you:	Suggested strategies
Indicate to a learner that you are paying attention?	<p>In a chat room</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">☆ Listen and then reply, either by whispering, or referring directly to the learner by name☆ Make sure that a refresh button is available in the delivery system☆ Ask specific questions and use the learner's name when replying to questions.☆ Encourage spontaneity and allow social time for personalities to show through the words☆ Convey you are attending by conveying body language cues (nodding) (big grin)☆ Use emoticons to indicate feelings <p>With email</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">☆ Provide a quick turnaround of email (agreed response times are good idea)☆ Send a quick email back to say you have received their message (acknowledgment)☆ Replies should be in a conversational tone☆ Encourage by email eg "I notice you have been working your way through the module, well done, only two more activities to go!" or some such reply.☆ Give them the information they requested <p>Generally</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">☆ Stop and pay attention- make your mind blank!☆ Be relaxed and responsive to interpreting the message☆ Be in the moment.☆ Use their name to reinforce their importance to you

- ☆ Focus on specific behaviour rather than on the learner personally
- ☆ Consider your on-line feedback as part of an ongoing relationship
- ☆ Quote points made by the learner to show that you have read and understood the message
- ☆ Ask questions
- ☆ All replies need to be open ended to allow for further input by the learner if they feel it is required – i.e. do not close the dialogue
- ☆ If reassurance is required – but don't dwell on the negative – as facilitators we need to bring out the positives/and encourage solutions
- ☆ Ask self help questions through the course and reply to answers with some comments
- ☆ Check forums regularly and respond if there is a need (sometimes participants are left hanging with their questions in the forum)
- ☆ Let them know you are there if they need you
- ☆ Encourage learners to respond to their peers- foster a learning community
- ☆ Respond to questions as soon as you can with relevant feedback. (i.e. comment on particular details of learner's messages)
- ☆ Reply as soon as possible to finished work/assignments, online exercises etc, and reply in ways that don't suggest stock standard answers- or communicate when they can anticipate feedback
- ☆ Check back with learners - ask them about what you have interpreted from their message
- ☆ Clarify by paraphrasing and then get learner to confirm you are on the right track
- ☆ Use the same terms and words the learner uses
- ☆ Use examples that relate specifically to the learners needs
- ☆ Use appropriate emoticons
- ☆ Provide a virtual suggestion box
- ☆ A phone call could help
- ☆ Set protocols for responding i.e. within 24-48 hours
- ☆ Let people know when you are not around
- ☆ Acknowledge feelings as well as content
- ☆ Follow up silence and check it isn't indicative of access and motivation problems .You need to work out what silences can mean, (learning styles etc), how you might approach them, and your tolerance and acceptance of silence and browsing.

Show empathy?

- ☆ Review your own perceptions and be mindful of assumptions
- ☆ Respond with positive intent
- ☆ Send a "psychological hug." (<http://www.psychological-hug.com/indexBP.htm>) by Lawrence J. Bookbinder, Ph.D.!
- ☆ Listen with the intent "Tune in" to understand the learners viewpoint, experiences, feelings and beliefs- *suspend judgement*
- ☆ Be sincere-walk in the others' shoes Warning: too much expression of empathy may be insincere. Too little empathy may appear insensitive
- ☆ Provide an opportunity for the learner to talk about what matters to her or him – *the power of voice*
- ☆ Allow person to vent so that you can then validate your interpretation of their feelings
- ☆ Communicate that you are still out there and listening to the learners needs
- ☆ Embrace diversity- cultural and linguistic differences and individual special needs
- ☆ Organise chats, forums, assessments to suit group needs if possible therefore empathising with their other commitments
- ☆ Look through the words to the person on the computer
- ☆ Give the learners lots of opportunities and choices that will fit their learning styles
- ☆ Use emoticons as tools for showing emotion
- ☆ Use positive and encouraging statements
- ☆ Be resourceful if you feel a learner is struggling, pick up the phone and call them
- ☆ Repeat (emotive) key words or phrases indicating that you have heard this issue
- ☆ Discuss similar experiences- let them know they are not alone
- ☆ Squelch the urge to give unsolicited advice
- ☆ (When asked), frame your comments as potential options, such as, "One approach that worked well for me was..." or, "Based on what you've told me, ... might be beneficial..."
- ☆ Ask the learner what they would like you to do at the start of the conversation, including whether they're looking for ideas and advice or just someone to listen

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☆ Use statements that demonstrate understanding of their situation: i.e.: "I can understand your frustration with this exercise", "I am sorry that you are having a hard time", and "I can see that you have put a lot of effort into doing this exercise" ☆ Put up personal stories and/or case studies that demonstrate similar situations to your present learners- maybe even testimonials about success stories in online learning ☆ Put yourself in the learner's place and do some of the exercises that you are giving to them!! ☆ Make comments about understanding their situation and then some strategies they could investigate-eg using a learning plan ☆ Offer a chat opportunity to discuss what's what ☆ Respond to humour with appropriate humour. ☆ Check you have acknowledged the content and feelings of the message ☆ Check contextual cues such as phrasing, choice of words, indicators of emotional energy. ☆ Use a variety of media to foster a connection. Use text, texttalk, images, colour, Audio cues (eg music, summaries) and video, mindmaps, poetry etc.
Encourage this learner to respond?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☆ Provide contact points and times for learners to access you ☆ Clarify the goals of the learner, outcomes desired and activities required by the course ☆ Provide for interaction in a safe, secure environment ☆ Ask open-ended questions to indicate interest and establish rapport ☆ Offer incentives and rewards ☆ Construct questions in non-repetitive manner (use logical steps or sequence) ☆ Provide catalysts to add oomph, variety and a spark to encourage engagement ☆ Ask about the learner in a getting to know you type of activity or profile ☆ In chat session use silence and pauses effectively ☆ Negotiate shared outcomes ☆ Provide personal positive feedback ☆ Make work assessable (formative/summative)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☆ Provide a challenge for the learner ☆ Show relevance of tasks and learning outcomes ☆ Use single lucid questions where possible ☆ Promote an understanding of asynchronous learning and communication ☆ Provide effective and timely feedback ☆ Be gentle with people and mindful of eTime. ☆ Give answers which provide adequate direction for the learner ☆ Use games or encouragements (eg Hall of Fame) so that learners will respond quickly ☆ Make exercises relevant to the learner's experience by contextualising the task ☆ Make learning fun and inviting ☆ Encourage learners to ask questions ☆ Send emails/reminders about activities and assignments/assessments ☆ Divide information and tasks into achievable bites/chunks so that work is not too daunting ☆ Space out assignments and activities so that work is not overwhelming ☆ Set motivational tasks that are achievable within timeframes ☆ Pose interesting questions in forums ☆ Organise a social activity chat. ☆ Use the KISS principle – keep it short and simple ☆ Convey minimal encouragers by conveying body language cues (nodding) and phatics such as ah hah and mm-hmm. ☆ Ask learner for more ..can you expand on
Clarify the meaning of the message?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☆ Paraphrase and repeat back in your own words (so what you mean is.....am I on the right track) ☆ Use open-ended questions ☆ Ask more questions to make sure that you got the message (in non threatening manner) ☆ Repeat through rephrasing of messages ☆ Use everyday examples to clarify the meaning of a message

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☆ Think thoroughly about what you are writing as you write it ☆ Do not send a message in haste ☆ Re read the message before you send ☆ Use emoticons ;-) and abbreviations <vbg> within the text to show emotions ☆ Ask whether a tone you are picking up is correct, eg "do I detect some frustration there?" (In private communication) ☆ Use diagrams and screen shots to clarify what the learner is meaning ☆ Use text creatively to clarify meaning and add to your text message. (Capitals to indicate SHOUTING, different <i>fonts</i>, <u>underlining</u>, punctuation!!!!, spacing ,symbols ***** ,and acronyms) ☆ Open issue for clarification up to a forum chat if there is a group need for clarification. Email your response to the learner (not in a forum) so that it is private.
Check for mutual understanding?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☆ Try to "read between the lines" – is there a message within the message? Tread warily with this, and check for understanding. ☆ Clarify, summarise and paraphrase the learners message to check you have received their intended message ☆ Be clear and concise when identifying course objectives, subjects, tasks, and assessment objectives ☆ Negotiate a contract – people respond better when they have a commitment ☆ Be encouraging and supportive in your reply to them ☆ Supply detailed contextual backgrounds ☆ Ask learner to confirm their understanding by email ☆ Encourage learner led discussions via forums, email and chat rooms - this enables facilitators to gauge conceptual understanding and provide/obtain feedback ☆ Use of various communication mediums i.e.: email, chat rooms, forums: anywhere, anytime!! ☆ Ask learner to summarise what action they think is required (email/forum/chat/phone) ☆ Promote a peer learning environment which allows learners to work through difficult texts and concepts more slowly ☆ Debrief sessions - allows learners to identify completion of module or topic - and provide/obtain feedback to areas they may have missed or not understood

- ☆ Establish learner support systems so learners can confer with one another
- ☆ Ask learners to send you a draft of how they are going to complete the assignment/task so you can provide feedback
- ☆ Ask learner to summarise what action they think is required (email/forum/chat/phone)
- ☆ Get feedback, ask for a précis/summary of what learners have understood, get them to give an example
- ☆ Weave landscapes and summaries for learners- or with learners
- ☆ Get groups to test one another
- ☆ Ask learners to do local fieldwork (surveys) etc to check that this concept is well understood
- ☆ Suggest learners prepare a short presentation eg upload a PowerPoint slideshow with chat questions afterwards
- ☆ Find common ground by drawing analogies and parallel scenarios that both the listener and receiver can relate to
- ☆ Design feedback so that understanding is evident and present
- ☆ Ask for feedback from groups as well as individuals - to check to see that the whole group/class understands the message
- ☆ Ask learners to send emails to facilitator in response to activities.

Here are some interesting sites to follow up on:

http://www.prenhall.com/dwyer_au.

<http://www.highgain.com/SELF/index.php3>

<http://www.adv-leadership-grp.com/programs/evaluations/listening.htm>

<http://www.eslcafe.com/search/Listening/>

Link provided by Lin Thompson

Benfield G. 2000. Teaching on the Web - Exploring the Meanings of Silence. UltiBase Online Journal. Melbourne. <http://ultibase.rmit.edu.au/Articles/online/benfield1.htm>

Important points to ponder

*"When you listen to somebody else,
whether you like it or not,
what they say becomes part of you ...
the common pool is created,
where people begin suspending their own opinions
and listening to other people's ...*

*At some point people begin recognising that
this common pool is more important than their separate pools"*

David Bohm, physicist

<http://www.co-i-l.com/coil/collaboration/index.shtml#origins>

Susanne Nyrop

Posted: Tue, 27 Aug 09:25:31 AEST Net* Working 2002

Did you ever think how nice it might be for people with hearing problems to interact online? They can turn off the hearing aid; do not have to ask what??? all the time, or to be dependant on reading lips, and they can be on the same level of listening to the text as everyone else. Same goes for physically disabled, provided they have proper help and adaptation of system to get access etc..

One of my learners wrote "Deaf person listening online!"

Thanks everyone for this opportunity for me to listen to your thoughts, ideas and experiences.

Jess

In the spirit of "open source", can you please acknowledge this document if you intend to use it