

# Improve Your Active Listening Skills

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# Overview



What is active listening?

Can you teach someone else?

Body language

Eye contact

Their tone

Responding during the conversation

Taking notes

Your personal debrief

Biting your tongue

The power of follow-up

Pause and plan



# What is Active Listening?

## Active listening

Body language is engaged

Eye contact

Periodic responses

Clarifying questions

Relevant questions

Patience (not a contest to talk)

## Passive listening

Distractions (TV, email, smart phone)

Looking over the shoulder

Repeatedly asking to repeat

Disinterested feedback (um-hm)

Wrong answers or poor questions

Anxious to interrupt



# Can You Teach Someone Else?

Whether you can or not...

If you listen well, you should be able to teach others

You should retain more, understand deeper, and be a better, more engaged listener

Try it: tell someone about a conversation you had with someone else

Try it: ask a participant what the most important things were from a meeting



# Body Language

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# Listen with Your Eyes



Watch their mannerisms

What do they do with their hands  
(excitement level)?

Where are they looking (deception, lack  
of clarity)?

How are their arms (crossed can mean  
being closed)?

Are they dancing around (nervous)?

And... what is your body language saying?

# Listen with Your Eyes



Engage them with eye contact – will keep them looking at you (unless they are lying, feel guilty, are ashamed, etc.)

NOTE: that is a generalization! Don't call someone out on that... maybe that is their personality!

Don't drill a hole through them with your eyes

Don't make them feel like they are being interrogated



# Eye Contact

Hello! Are you there?

Not creepy

Not too much

Definitely not too little

Don't follow distractions (other people, any part of their clothes, body, the TV, your watch or phone, etc.)





## Their Tone

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# What Does Their Tone Say?



Where are they emotionally (stressed, excited, bored, etc.)?

Do they believe what they are saying?

Is there a sense of urgency?

Will you need to resolve this immediately?

Do they trust you by sharing secret information?

# Emotions Expressed with Tone

Stressed

Excited

Bored

Scared

I believe what  
I'm saying



# Emotions Expressed with Tone

I don't believe what  
I'm saying

Sense of urgency

I trust you

I don't trust you

Forced



# Responding During the Conversation

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# How to Respond Appropriately



Well-timed, appropriate, interested "m-hm"

Nodding or shaking your head

Mirror their emotions and body language

Ask clarifying questions

Respond to (even acknowledge!) their responses

Sum up: "Let me see if I understand you correctly... are you saying [insert your own words here]?"



# Other Ways to Say That



“Let me see if I understand you correctly... are you saying [insert your own words here]?”

“Do you mean to say \_\_\_\_\_?”

“Are you saying that \_\_\_\_\_?”

“Are you implying \_\_\_\_\_?”

“Are you telling him that \_\_\_\_\_?”

# Taking Notes

What and when to write:



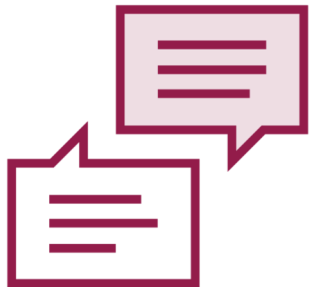
Don't let your note taking become a distraction



Notes on the phone might say "I'm on Facebook, too!"



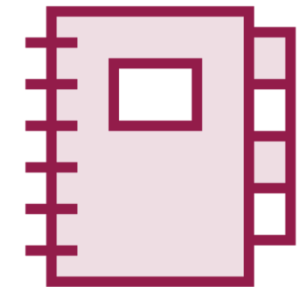
Jot down the main points of the conversation



Writing everything might mean you miss part of the conversation



Create special annotation for follow-up (action items)



Write more details once the conversation is over





# Your Personal Debrief



This should be written:

- Summary of conversation
- What did you learn?
- What did you think about the conversation and information?
- How would you do things differently?
- What do you need to follow-up on?

# Biting Your Tongue

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# Biting Your Tongue



This is not a contest



Do not focus so much on your response or ideas that you  
(a) don't listen, or (b) maybe worse, interrupt

# Resist the Need to Interrupt



It is not a race

If you forget your thoughts/ideas, figure out a system

- “I don’t remember what I was going to say,” or
- Write your points down, so you don’t forget

Interrupting is a big sign of “I don’t care... let me talk”

Be prepared so you can focus more on their message and body language, and respond appropriately

# Resist the Need to Interrupt

Know what your main objectives are

Are some of your talking points tangents or distractions to your main objectives?

Avoid the temptation to respond eloquently in your mind while they are still talking (you might miss stuff)



# Resist the Need to Interrupt



Be ready to not get all of your points across

Save them for a later conversation

Email the points later

Maybe they are less relevant as the conversation progresses

It's not about winning

“He who talks first, loses”

# The Power of Follow-up

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# Follow-up Can...

Show your interest level in  
the topic

Show your level of commitment on the  
project

Build more trust in  
the relationship

Show they can trust you with more  
(work, info, contacts, introductions,  
referrals, etc.)





# Follow-up Can Be...



A quick, simple email

A comprehensive summary (email)

A phone call or voice mail

A gift, article, or something else  
with “thought”

A report back (“return and report”)

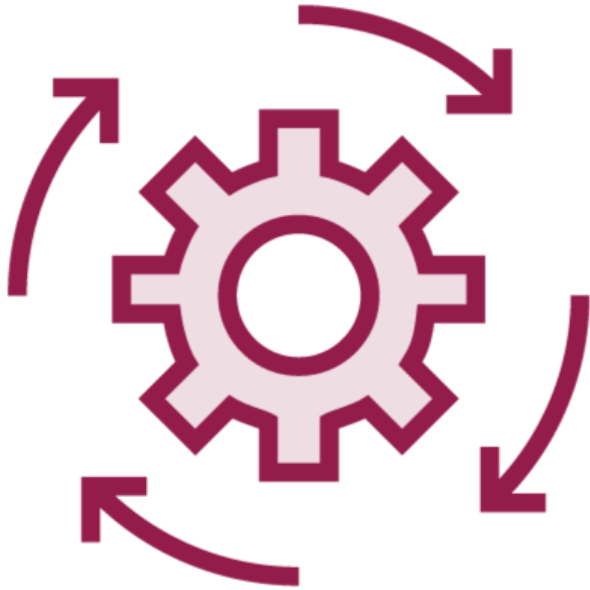


# Pause and Plan

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# When Will You Practice This?



Identify a situation

What will you specifically work on?

- Removing distractions
- Reading body language
- Eye contact
- Etc.

When will you do this?

# When Will You Practice This?



One-on-one conversation



“I will work on watching the person's face and body language, in a non-creepy way.”

# When Will You Practice This?

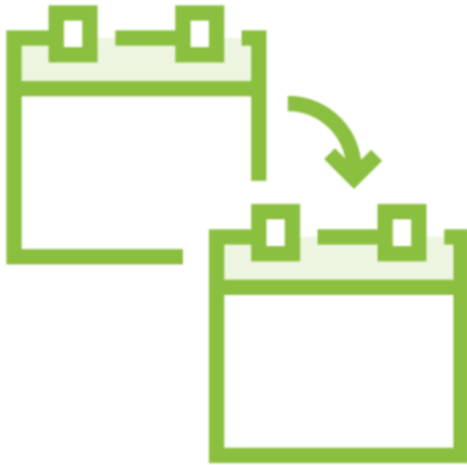


Information meeting



“I’m going to summarize the main points, list my action items, and then repeat to a colleague what the meeting was about and what I got out of it.”

# When Will You Practice This?

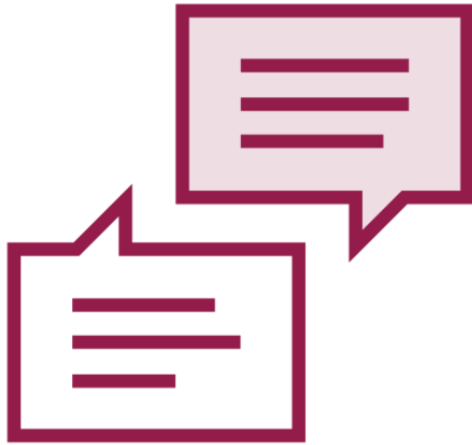


Weekly planning meeting



"I will list who talks, what their main projects are, issues or suggestions brought up, and what appropriate follow-up should be."

# When Will You Practice This?



When talking with someone



“I will repeat and clarify what they say.”

(This will seem uncomfortable, but try this five times this week: “do you mean to say...” or “are you saying...” or “is there anything I missed?”)



# When Will You Practice This?



Watching another  
Pluralsight course



“I will remove all distractions, take  
meaningful notes, and leave a comment in  
the discussion box with one or two things I  
have learned, and how that will help me.”





# Summary



## Active Listening Skills

- Active vs. passive listening
- Taking notes
- Communication during a conversation
- Eye contact and body language
- Tone
- Follow-up
- Assignments

Next up:  
Additional systems  
and tips to improve  
our listening skills

