



Two Minute Listening Activity

Adapted with permission by C.K. Gunsalus from an exercise developed by John Barkai

Overview

This exercise allows participants to assess their own listening skill and focus.

There are reasons that humans tend not to be good listeners—and yet how much we value being listened to:

- A listener has not only speaker's voice to listen to, but an *internal voice that keeps up a simultaneous dialogue of critiquing, analyzing and judging what is being heard* (Krisco 1997), meaning that listening time is often spent planning rebuttals rather than actively listening
- It takes cognitive and emotional energy to listen/attend to others closely—and it demonstrates respect, which is especially important in academic environments with so many who have imposter syndrome to varying degrees.

Activity

- 1) Ask group to select a controversial question on campus
- 2) Divide into dyads: each pair has a speaker and a listener/questioner (do not permit groups of three—keep pairing until everyone participates)
- 3) Questioner asks the agreed-upon open-ended question (“what do you think about [controversial question]?”)
- 4) For the next two minutes (can reduce to 90 seconds if time is short), questioner may only ask the questions on the list* while the speaker speaks
- 5) The questioner *may not take notes*
- 6) Call time
- 7) The questioner must repeat back the views of speaker, to speaker's satisfaction, as signaled by thumbs up/”you've got it”
- 8) Participants switch roles, and repeat steps 3-6
- 9) Time is up after repeat-back has been completed,
- 10) Debrief

*use this with handout that lists passive listening prompts





Debrief

Ask the participants the following questions, in the order in which they are written:

- Who was working harder in this exercise: the questioner/listener or the speaker?
(Virtually always, the majority will say the listener) Why? (Because you have to concentrate and be able to say it back)
- How often do you listen that intently? *(Unless they are health care workers/psychologists, most people will say not very often)*
- How often are you listened TO that intently? How did that feel? *(sometimes, people will say it was uncomfortable to be listened to that intently; explore that a bit; mostly, though, they say it felt good—moment to talk about the effect of the listener on the speaker)*

We tend to be crummy listeners for both physiological and social reasons:

- *physiological: Research on listening demonstrates that we think faster than we can listen (we speak at 120-150 words/minute, but have the cognitive capacity to process speech at 400-500 words/min); while someone is speaking, we tend to listen ahead, prepare our own arguments, woolgather...*
- *Social: we ask each other questions all day long we don't intend to be answered: "hi there, how are you?" (Well, I may need some knee surgery and that last storm ...) "great, great" ; international visitors find it difficult to learn which questions we really intend as questions not greetings*

Optional debrief questions: (not generally used in EAL programs)

- What was the body language of responder?
- What does it look/feel like when someone is working hard to be responsive?
- Did the responder notice much about the questioner? (notice simpleness of questions? Notice how awkward questioner felt?)
- How did you feel about this exercise?

