






4 Active listening

Effective communication is about speaking *and* listening. In her book *You're not Listening: What You're Missing and Why it Matters*, Kate Murphy describes it as being like playing a game of catch. Why might this be?



1 AWARENESS

-  a) Set the timer on your phone for one minute. Close your eyes, sit still and listen to the sounds around you. Once the minute is up, make a note of everything you heard. Compare your notes with those of a partner. Repeat the day after, but this time set the timer for two minutes.
-  b) With a partner, discuss what makes hearing different from listening.
-  c) The US businessman and speaker Stephen R. Covey wrote in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*:

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Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.

From: Stephen R. Covey,
The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, 2020

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Think back to a recent conversation you had. Did the other person really listen to what you were saying? Did you have the feeling that they were giving you their full attention or were they glancing at their phone or maybe someone or something else? Or did you have the feeling that they were just waiting for you to stop what you were saying so that they could offer a story about themselves, give you advice or just change the subject? And what about you?

2 REFLECTION

- a) Psychologists Carl R. Rogers and Richard E. Farson came up with the term “active listening”, saying:


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It is called ‘active’ because the listener has a very definite responsibility. He does not passively absorb the words which are spoken to him. He actively tries to grasp the facts and the feelings in what he hears, and he tries, by his listening, to help the speaker work out his own problems.

From: Carl R. Rogers and
Richard E. Farson, *Active Listening*, 2015

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You probably know someone who is a good listener as well as someone who isn’t. What makes someone a good listener? Think about what they do and how they act.

-  b) Find someone in your class with whom you have a different opinion about a topic (e.g. eating habits, ways of behaving etc.). You are going to talk about this topic for five minutes. But instead of trying to convince the other person of your point of view, listen to what *they* have to say. Try using these strategies:

TIP

- Ask open-ended questions to find out more about what they think and to show your interest.
- Practise non-judgemental listening – so put your own thoughts and biases aside.
- Try paraphrasing some of what they say to ensure that you understand what they are saying and to show that you are listening.

When the time is up, think about what you found easy / difficult. Active listening requires a lot of effort, doesn’t it? So, it’s good to practise it as often as you can.