



## 2. Active Listening (adapted from Langlois, 2010)

Developing effective listening skills is a basic competency for managing teams. Questioning and observing a team member facilitates a team member's sharing of important personal information. Talking without focus can be distracting. The more focused the listening process, the more likely team members are to explore complaints about doing the project, making the team perform successfully, and discussing individual problems.

Listening is a prerequisite for effective team management. When a team member fails to listen, the other team members may be discouraged from self-exploring, discuss inappropriate issues, and become impatient about having to discuss and analyze the task and team process.

Active Listening consists of four listening skills that support useful listening techniques. Active listening techniques supports the successful formation of relationships and ultimately the effectiveness of the team's collaboration. Improving communication skills requires team members to "listen" to both verbal and nonverbal messages. To maximize your communication skills, you will need to become as neutral as possible. Specifically, it is helpful to refrain from making judgments, resist distractions, avoid asking too many questions, avoid giving advice, and stay focused on the team member.

The following are some examples of past students' comments when students observed their listening skills while trying to actively listen.

"By doing this exercise, I have realized how easily and how often my mind wanders when someone is talking to me. I am on my own time, and in my own one-track mind. But since I was forced to make a summary of what they were saying, I paid more attention, and had to ask more questions, and they had to help me along with my summary. It is important to be a good listener when you are a team leader, so I have found that I need to improve on that. I am also not that great at communication, because I don't speak enough in formal terms, I usually talk to friends and don't need to think that much and use that much vocabulary. But I was having a hard time explaining my experiment to Lilah in very clear and technical terms, I could only describe it very simply."

"Today's listening activity was more productive than I thought it would be. I was a little skeptical at first. But after actually making an attempt to listen with

all my focus on the speaker, I realized that there is quite a big difference between conversational listening and active listening. The big difference being that in active listening I am paying attention to what the speaker is saying; trying to remember it and store it away. I think I should active listen more when I'm in lecture, because that's the time when I find myself paying the least attention..."

".....The clarification step is the most useful in my opinion. Many times, we are told something and we think that we understand it, but actually don't understand it the way it's supposed to be understood or the way that the person who told us understands us to understand it. By repeating it back to them, or clarifying, we ensure that the message is understood in exactly the way that it was intended to be. Summarizing what you learned is also useful. I consider this to be mostly a supplement to the clarification step. I think that a great deal of summarizing goes on during the clarification step... I have a problem with active listening. I'm more of a passive listener and I often skip the clarification step, to the detriment of my understanding. Now that I know the problem, I can employ my new active listening skills to overcome the problem and to become competent in everyday activities related to basic communication. "

**Active Listening Skills (See Table I) consists of the following four stages.**

- (1) **Clarification** (asking open-ended questions that help to clarify ambiguous words, phrases or statements, e.g., "What do you mean by (ambiguous word)?" "Can you explain that a little more?")
- (2) **Paraphrase** (deals with the content of the communication; rephrasing content as closely as possible to highlight message that was heard; describes a situation, event, person or idea)
- (3) **Reflection** (deals with the feelings associated with the content; serves to label feelings correctly and to encourage further expression; refers to the affect part of the message)
- (4) **Summarization** (ties the whole communication together by restating both content [paraphrase] and feelings [reflection] in an integrated manner; conveys the impression that team member has been heard)

**Table I. Definitions and Intended Purposes of Listening Responses**  
(Langlois 2010)

<i>Response</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Intended Purpose</i>
<b>CLARIFICATION</b>	A question beginning, e.g., "Do you mean that...", plus a rephrasing of the speaker's message.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To encourage more elaboration.</li> <li>2. To check out the accuracy of what you heard being said.</li> <li>3. To clear up vague, confusing messages.</li> </ol>
<b>PARAPHRASE</b>	A rephrasing of the content of the speaker's message.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To help the speaker focus on the content of his/her message.</li> <li>2. To highlight content when attention to feelings is premature or self-defeating.</li> </ol>
<b>REFLECTION</b>	A rephrasing of the affective part of the speaker's message.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To encourage speaker to express more of his/her feelings.</li> <li>2. To have the speaker experience feelings more intensely.</li> <li>3. To help speaker become more aware of feelings that dominate him/her.</li> <li>4. To help the speaker acknowledge and manage feelings.</li> <li>5. To help the speaker discriminate accurately among feelings.</li> </ol>
<b>SUMMARIZATION</b>	Two or more paraphrases or reflections that condense the speaker's messages or the session.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To tie together the multiple elements.</li> <li>2. To identify a common theme or pattern.</li> <li>3. To interrupt excessive rambling.</li> <li>4. To review progress.</li> </ol>

## Using Personal Skills for Effective Interventions (Langlois, 2010)

