

## Listening Skills

The following is a list of critical listening skills. When these skills are used appropriately, along with your personal style, they will enhance any conversation. Practicing these skills is the key to mastering all of them.

### Silence

Silence is an important tool to learn how to use when communicating with another person. Silence allows an individual to speak at his/her own pace, and to think about what he/she might want to say. This is an effective way to listen when someone first comes to you with a problem because he/she can provide pieces of information as he/she is ready to divulge them. Try not to be uncomfortable with “awkward silences” because this method of communication can be very useful.

### Minimal Encouragers

Minimal encouragers are short verbalizations or body movements that let an individual know that you are hearing what he/she is saying. They are an excellent way to show that you are listening to someone, without interrupting him/her. Try to avoid encouragers that sound like you are agreeing or forming an opinion, such as “yes”.

#### *Examples:*

a head nod  
saying “umhmm”  
saying “okay”

### Non-Verbal (Active Listening)

Body language is a large part of communicating with another person. To demonstrate that you are listening to someone, try to maintain an “open” posture, eye contact, and avoid fidgeting.

### Open-Ended and Close-Ended Questions

Close-ended questions are questions that usually elicit a one-word answer. This type of question is effective for retrieving factual information.

#### *Examples:*

“How old are you?”  
“How long have you been attending the University of Guelph?”

Open-ended questions are questions that usually encourage an elaborate answer. This type of question is effective if you want someone to open up or to expand on something.

*Examples:*

“Can you explain how you were feeling when that happened?”

“How did you handle this situation?”

### Clarifiers

Clarifiers are brief questions asked by the listener in order to clear up any misunderstandings. These are helpful because they give the listener the opportunity to get the facts straight, and the talker has the chance to correct the listener if he/she has been misunderstood.

*Examples:*

“It sounds like you felt upset when that happened. Is that correct?”

“It sounds like this person’s response confused you. Is that right?”

### Paraphrasing Data

Paraphrasing data is when you feed back what an individual has just said to you in a shortened form, and in your own words. This allows you, the listener, to make sure you have heard the other person correctly. The talker also has the opportunity to correct you if you have misunderstood. In addition, it allows you, the listener, to collect your thoughts if the conversation has been an engaging or challenging one. Be careful not to “parrot” back the individual’s words. Be sure to use some of the other person’s key words along with some of your own.

### Reflection of Feelings

Reflecting feelings is similar to paraphrasing, but instead of feeding back what the individual has just said to you, you want to feed back the feeling that it sounds like he/she is experiencing. This helps the individual to explore the feelings he/she is having at the time, or had in the past.

*Example:*

“So, it sounds like you are feeling angry.”

“It sounds like every time your partner shows up late, you feel frustrated.”

“It sounds like you felt a lot of relief when your friend arrived home safely.”