

Practicing “Triple A” Listening to Improve Your Communication Skills

Objective

To improve active listening skills by reducing barriers to good communication.

What to Know

Good conversations require self-awareness, attention, and focused effort known as active listening. Listening is not the same as hearing. Listening is a conscious activity based on three skills: attitude, attention, and adjustment – known as “Triple A” listening.

1. Attitude. When you start a conversation, have a good attitude and positive mindset as you listen. Limit negative thoughts before you've fully heard what someone has to say. A negative attitude is distracting, and you might not hear the other person.

2. Attention. Intentionally show the other person you're listening through verbal and physical cues. Be encouraging by making eye contact, nodding as they speak, smiling, and mirroring their body language. Ignore distractions and avoid focusing on your own problems.

3. Adjustment. Keep an open mind as you listen, and be willing to change, adapt, and adjust to follow the speaker's train of thought. Adapt your perspective based on what they say and be willing to change your mind. To increase your understanding of what's being said, repeat information and ask questions.

These three basic listening skills help you become an active listener. If you think you need to have a better attitude, pay more attention, and be more flexible, you might have barriers to good listening. Once you're aware of these barriers, you can make adjustments. Check off any of the following that apply to you.

You tend to get bored when listening to others speak.

You often get distracted by what's going on internally, such as having a headache, being hungry, or not feeling well.

Having an open mind is hard for you because you believe you already know what others are going to say or have answers to what they are speaking about.

Your mind is often filled with thoughts, or you tend to daydream.

You get distracted by what's going on around you, like music, traffic, or phone notifications.

You have emotional reactions, biases, or prejudices that block you from really hearing what others are saying.

You get triggered when someone talks about hot-button topics like politics or religion.

____ You have problems understanding what others are saying (e.g., when there are language barriers).

____ You have a medical condition that makes it difficult for you to pay attention.

If you checked off two or more statements, you might want to deal with these barriers to improve your active listening skills. You can:

- wait until someone is done speaking before you respond
- ask open-ended questions instead of yes/no questions
- Summarize their words out loud or in your head.
- begin conversations with a good attitude and an open mind
- give the speaker respect and avoid interrupting
- put yourself in the other person's shoes
- eliminate as many outside distractions as possible, including background noise
- be patient while others are speaking
- observe nonverbal signs like the speaker's body movements and posture
- work on ways to focus and improve your attention span

What to Do

Now it's time to practice "Triple A" listening. Here are some examples:

Attitude. Maybe you aren't interested in a coworker's presentation. Put a positive spin on it and think something like, "David has a much different skill set than me, so I can probably learn a lot from his presentation." If you're in a bad mood or distracted by your own problems, reschedule a meeting or conversation, if possible.

Attention. If you're in a meeting, communicate that you're paying attention by making eye contact with the speaker, nodding, and writing down important points. If a someone is speaking to you, mimic their body language and ask questions.

Adjustment. Perhaps you don't agree with your employer's strategies. In the next meeting you have with them, put your feelings aside. It's okay to disagree with someone, but really listen before reacting, formulating a response, or tuning them out. Offer a respectful, thoughtful response – even if you disagree.

As you complete this exercise over the next two weeks, ask yourself the following questions whenever you're engaged in a conversation.

- What is this conversation about?
- What are the main ideas, conclusions, or arguments?
- Are the speaker's conclusions truthful or false?
- How does this affect me?
- What can I do and how can I respond?
- What can I do to have a good attitude, pay attention, and adjust as needed?

Reflections on This Exercise

Did this activity help you improve your active listening skills and reduce barriers to good communication? Why or why not?

What else can you do to improve your active listening skills?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
