

WAYS TO DEVELOP LISTENING SKILLS

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Abstract. This article provides feedback on ways to develop listening skills.

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Listening skills are an essential part of good communication. When you are an attentive listener, you can begin to improve relationships, make decisions more effectively and reach agreements with others quickly.

It can be beneficial to evaluate your current listening skills to determine areas for improvement. Here are some ways to improve your listening skills:

Visualize what the speaker is saying

Try to conjure up mental images of what the speaker is talking about while you are listening to help retain information. This may be a literal picture or other concepts that relate to the topic. This will help you to remember keywords and phrases when you listen for long periods. Visualizing what the speaker is saying will also help you to not have to prepare for what to say next. If you happen to lose focus, make sure to immediately refocus.

Limit judgments

Listen without criticizing the speaker in your mind while they talk. Even if the message causes you agitation or alarm, try to avoid thinking about negative or judgmental comments because this compromises your ability to listen. You also want to listen with an open mind and understand that the person is giving you their perspective. You may realize that they make more sense as they continue to talk to you, and you won't know the full story without listening.

Don't interrupt

Everyone speaks and processes information at different rates. If someone is delivering their message slowly, try to cultivate patience and wait for them to finish before trying to rush them along by guessing the next thing they are going to say or replying before they have finished talking. Interrupting sends the wrong message to the speaker. It may suggest that what you have to say is more important, that you don't care about what they are saying or that the conversation is a competition.

It is also important to refrain from offering solutions. Most often people just want you to listen. However, if you have a brilliant idea, you may consider asking if you can share your ideas before you offer your solution.

Wait for a pause to ask questions

You may not understand everything someone says to you. It is best to wait until they pause to ask them to back up and provide clarification for the topic or phrase you misunderstood.

Ask clarifying questions

Asking clarifying questions helps to keep the conversation on topic. You only want to ask questions that pertain to your understanding rather than ask a question about something that is not related to the main idea the speaker is trying to get across. When you ask clarifying questions without interrupting, it shows that you are listening, paying attention and willing to discuss things further.

Empathize with the speaker

Empathy is essential to effective listening. You should mirror the emotions the speaker has. For instance, if their face conveys sadness or joy then your facial expressions and words should also convey similar emotions. Empathizing with the speaker takes concentration and expends energy, but it allows for open communication and establishes relationships.

Pay attention to nonverbal cues

Some of the communication that takes place between individuals is nonverbal. You can learn a great deal about someone through their body language and tone of voice when they are communicating with you. It is easy to detect boredom, enthusiasm or irritation on someone's face when they talk depending on their eyes, mouth and position of their shoulders. Therefore, listening also includes paying attention to nonverbal cues. It helps you to make inferences based on what a person means when they are talking to you.

Provide the speaker with feedback

Feedback can be verbal and nonverbal. You can use verbal feedback by saying things like, "I understand that must be difficult," or "OK." You can use nonverbal cues such as nodding your head and using appropriate facial expressions.

The goal is to send signals to the speaker so they know that you are actively listening. In a situation where someone is giving you tasks, make sure to repeat the task list back to the speaker so they know you understand what to do. Writing down what they say also shows attentiveness.

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