

# ACTIVE LISTENING

*competency*



## Difficulty



# Active Listening

Effective performers offer their full attention when others speak. They listen actively, giving verbal and nonverbal cues of their interest. When the speaker has finished, they paraphrase what was said to ensure understanding.

Level	Performance Indicators and Behavioral Examples
<b>4</b> Strategic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A listening champion; is instrumental in establishing sustainable organization-wide communication initiatives in which active listening is valued and recognized.</li><li>• Holds organization accountable for maintaining effective listening skills.</li><li>• Establishes formal and informal reward systems for effective listening.</li><li>• Sets up customer “listening” programs.</li></ul>
<b>3</b> Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Frequently mentors others in active listening skills.</li><li>• Sought for roles requiring advanced listening skills; (i.e., problem solving groups, ombudsperson, etc.).</li><li>• Exceptionally adept at interpreting and reinforcing genuine dialogue; personable and approachable.</li></ul>
<b>2</b> Applied	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Encourages speaker with appropriate responses; reinforces the speaker with an occasional nod or “yes” to indicate attentiveness.</li><li>• Actively sets aside distracters (e.g., closes door, turns off phone, etc.) to ensure full attention.</li><li>• Summarizes or clarifies comments to ensure understanding.</li></ul>
<b>1</b> Elementary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Uses and interprets non-verbal behaviors to enhance understanding; maintains eye contact; uses appropriate facial expressions, gestures, postures, to demonstrate attentiveness.</li><li>• Shows full attention; does not interrupt.</li><li>• Asks basic questions to clarify.</li></ul>
<b>0</b> Inadequate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fails to listen; interrupts.</li><li>• Spends time planning rebuttal rather than listening to message.</li><li>• Sends the impression that the speaker is not welcome, the message not wanted. No eye contact. No verbal or non-verbal affirmations.</li><li>• Does not control environment to ensure open dialogue and prevent distractions (e.g., doesn't forward phone calls, leaves office door open, sets up a distant, too formal, seating arrangement, etc.).</li></ul>

## Significance

Mother Nature gave us a big hint on the importance of listening when she gave us TWO ears and ONE mouth. Truly active listening is essential for problem solving, relationship building, adapting to new challenges and maintaining open communications. For those in supervisory roles, Active Listening is always in the top ten competencies that followers consider necessary for effective leadership.

## Best Ways To Develop

Diagnose your current perceived listening skills, realizing that listening isn't about not talking, but being fully present and attentive. Practice active listening and solicit feedback on your effectiveness.

## Improving Your Capacity

You must choose to listen. Prepare your mind and body – focus completely on the message. Become conscious of the messages your behavior is relaying back to the speaker.

Clarify the message—paraphrase the message back to the speaker to make sure you understand. Ask open-ended questions to gather more information.

Don't interrupt - no matter how urgent your contribution or observation may be.

**Read:** *The Business of Listening: A Practical Guide to Effective Listening (Fifty-Minute Series)* by Diane Bonet.

**Read:** *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* by Deborah Tannen.

**Activity:** Videotape a conversation to observe yourself listening. Debrief with a coach.

**Listen:** *Listening: The Forgotten Skill* by Madelyn Burley-Allen.

## Start Today

Go out and initiate an informal conversation. Start by asking “open” questions. Then concentrate on paying 100% attention to the answer you get.

For the next 24 hours, keep a log of conversations you engage in (including telephone, e-mail, etc.) Identify personal barriers to listening (i.e., interrupting, distractions, concentrating on own reply.) Look for patterns.

Ask a trusted friend for feedback on your listening skills.

## Tips

- It's not enough to listen, you should also communicate to the speaker that you're listening—show interest, give verbal and non-verbal cues that you're interested.
- Eliminate distractions (e.g., phone, computer) and create a good listening environment when possible.

**Remember, the key to improving competency is not just learning about the skill but choosing a takeaway and developing an action plan to put new behaviors into practice until it becomes a natural response.**

# Development Action Planning Form

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**Step 1:** Choose a competency area to develop.

**Target Competency:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Step 2:** Describe a positive outcome in the target area of competence; include your vision of a preferred future state.

**Goal Statement:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Vision Statement:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Step 3:** List the benefits of achieving your desired end state.

**Benefits:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Step 4:** Brainstorm the actions you might take to achieve your goal. For each, anticipate obstacles and options for overcoming them.

Action Steps	Obstacles	Options
1.		
2.		
3.		

**Step 5:** Finalize your action steps based on your brainstorming in Step 4. Now, list each action you must take to achieve your goal, including time frames and resources you will need.

Action Steps	Time Frames	Resources
1.		
2.		
3.		

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