

Improving Your Listening Skills

A large portion of learning in college begins with listening. However, many students have not developed active listening skills. The result is poor note taking, difficulty remembering things, and poor test performance. Learning to actively listen and using the skill during lecture will greatly improve your success as a student.

Start by identifying poor listening habits...

- **Attending to distractions-** Student often have much on their minds. (i.e., a test later in the day, an argument with their friend etc.) that take them away from the lecture. They are also sometimes distracted by the other activities in the room (i.e., clock ticking, gum smacking, etc.) or the professor's delivery (monotone, disorganization, etc.)
- **Faking it-** when other things are on their minds, students sometimes deliberately look as if they are listening. Doing so gives the wrong impression to the instructor who may assume the student understood or otherwise heard the instructions.
- **Passively listening-** in college we need to be active in our listening and go beyond facts, so that we can fully attend to the concepts and begin pulling information together. Listening to only the facts or details is passive and misses the main points of the lecture. This puts the student at a disadvantage. It's also a waste of time.
- **Rehearsing or Interrupting-** when students are considering (or giving) their response to the instructor, they are no longer listening. Listening drops to zero when the listeners react so strongly to one part of the presentation that they miss what follows. It is important that we understand the speakers point of view before we accept or reject it.
- **Allowing Attitude to take over-** it is worthwhile to take the position that you can find something of interest in every lecture. The alternate is allowing an attitude or belief that maybe the subject or instructor is dull

or boring and that I already know everything about this subject. Don't miss an opportunity for new perspectives or reinforcement of previous learning pass you by.

Replace these ineffective habits with more effective ones...

- Paying attention- practice focused attention instead of falling prey to the always present distractors. Ward off distractions by promising to remain focused for the lecture in its entirety.
- Listening for the whole message
- Hearing before evaluating- slow down and don't automatically begin critiquing your lectures. Instead, practice actively listening by taking excellent notes.
- Paraphrasing what was heard- make mental summaries when the instructor takes a break to write something on the board. Frequent summarizing will improve your memory retention as well.