**Becoming an Active Listener**

There are five key active listening techniques. They all help you ensure that you hear the other person, and that the other person knows you are hearing what they say.

**1. Pay Attention**

Give the speaker your undivided attention, and acknowledge the message. Recognize that non-verbal communication also "speaks" loudly.

* Look at the speaker directly.
* Put aside distracting thoughts.
* Don't mentally prepare a rebuttal!
* Avoid being distracted by environmental factors. For example, side conversations.
* "Listen" to the speaker's [**body language**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/Body_Language.htm) .

**2. Show That You're Listening**

Use your own body language and gestures to convey your attention.

* Nod occasionally.
* Smile and use other facial expressions.
* Note your posture and make sure it is open and inviting.
* Encourage the speaker to continue with small verbal comments like yes, and uh huh.

**3. Provide Feedback**

Our personal filters, assumptions, judgments, and beliefs can distort what we hear. As a listener, your role is to understand what is being said. This may require you to reflect what is being said and ask questions.

* Reflect what has been said by paraphrasing. "What I'm hearing is," and "Sounds like you are saying," are great ways to reflect back.
* Ask questions to clarify certain points. "What do you mean when you say." "Is this what you mean?"
* Summarize the speaker's comments periodically.

**Tip:**

If you find yourself responding emotionally to what someone said, say so, and ask for more information: "I may not be understanding you correctly, and I find myself taking what you said personally. What I thought you just said is XXX; is that what you meant?"

**4. Defer Judgment**

Interrupting is a waste of time. It frustrates the speaker and limits full understanding of the message.

* Allow the speaker to finish each point before asking questions.
* Don't interrupt with counter arguments.

**5. Respond Appropriately**

Active listening is a model for respect and understanding. You are gaining information and perspective. You add nothing by attacking the speaker or otherwise putting him or her down.

* Be candid, open, and honest in your response.
* Assert your opinions respectfully.
* Treat the other person in a way that you think he or she would want to be treated.