



ACTIVE LISTENING

OVERVIEW

Active listening embedded in classroom discussions can help both students and teachers practice reflecting on what is being communicated and trying to interpret and better understand others' ideas. For students, it can help them stay engaged in discussions and connect the relevance of other students' work to their own. Active listening can prompt students to ask provocative questions, and help students evaluate how their own experience colors their reaction to others' ideas.

ACTIVE LISTENING ACTIVITIES

General Prompts for Active Listening

Active listening has behavioral components that, when practiced, engage the students both as audience members and as presenters. It also sets the tone for collaboration and mutual learning, which are critical for student success. Setting the stage for active listening includes prompting students to:

- Make eye contact.
- Acknowledge engagement through gestures (nodding head) and facial expressions.
- Restate what the person just said in your own mind, and with your own interpretation.
- Ask clarification questions once in a while.
- Be aware of your own feelings and strong opinions.

Additionally, having students engage in partnered note-taking helps bridge gaps between audience and presenter, and provides practical support for students who are presenting. Pair students up, and have each student take notes for the other during presentations.

Prompting Students with Questions

As students are presenting work, have students in the audience reflect through writing. The reflections can focus on the presentation content and delivery. These notes then become the starting point for post-presentation discussion. You can use the following questions to guide the students' reflection and subsequent discussion.

Reflecting on Content

- What was the clearest point in the presentation? What was the muddiest?
- Did the presenter give enough breadth to his/her subject by studying it from multiple angles? Was there enough depth? What suggestions do you have for additional content?
- Did the presenter seem biased to the subject? Did he/she include additional perspectives or counter-arguments?
- What would you change about the content to make it stronger?
- Are the ideas novel? What might make them more unique?

READINGS & RESOURCES

Kaplan, Matthew and Silver, Naomi. *Using Reflection and Metacognition to Improve Student Learning: Across the Disciplines, Across the Academy*. Stylus Publishing, 2013.

Ritchhart, Ron, Church, Mark, Morrison, Karen. *Making Thinking Visible: How to Promote Engagement, Understanding, and Independence for All Learners*. Jossey-Bass, 2011.

Reflecting on Delivery

- How effective was the presenter in engaging you as an audience member?
- Did he/she speak clearly? Did you fully understand the argument or idea? What could he/she do to improve?
- Was the presentation organized and did it lead you through the presenter's ideas and thinking in a logical way?

Connecting Audience and Presenter

Additional questions to guide active listening can help students in the audience connect the presenter's work to their own.

- What did the presentation make you think about related to your own work?
- How would you continue the work that the presenter has given?
- What could you "use" in your own argument or project?
- What would you need to change to relate it to your own argument or project?