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Active Listening

Our ability to listen is often taken for granted. However, listening is not just a case of being within hearing distance of a speaker; it's a skill that, if used effectively, can significantly improve your academic achievement.

Are you a good listener? Answer these questions honestly.

- Do you always 'take in' what others say to you?
- Do you talk 'to' people rather than 'at' them?
- Do you let people finish speaking before you start?
- Do you respond to what they are saying or just wait for a gap to make your own point?
- Do you stay focussed on the speaker even if you don't like him or the subject is a bit dry?

If you answered 'no' any of these questions, you need to think about improving your listening skills. Ask someone to watch you in a group discussion. Ask for comments on the type of listener you are, based on the questions above. You may be quite surprised by the feedback you get.

Improving your listening skills

- Consider the speaker's feelings.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Use reassuring body language such as nodding in agreement.
- Focus on the content. Link information to things you already know.
- Think of ways to make the information relevant to *you*.
- Jot down key words or questions you may want to ask when the speaker has finished talking.

These strategies will help keep you focussed on what the speaker is saying and also help you retain the information that you hear. Active listening can be particularly useful at Job interviews, in addition to seminars and lectures.