

ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS

Active Listening Skills

1. *Attending*—orienting yourself to the other person and being aware of non-verbal cues. Includes maintaining eye contact, displaying a relaxed posture, and using natural gestures.
2. *Paraphrasing*—restating the other person’s message in a simpler, more understandable form.
3. *Reflecting*—similar to paraphrasing, but involves expressing what was *not* said.
 - Reflecting content: the most similar to paraphrasing; involves expressing the content of what was said in fresh or different words
STUDENT: His comments really hurt me.
LISTENER: It upset you a lot.
 - Reflecting feelings: restating essential feelings which may have been verbalized directly or indirectly by the other person
STUDENT: I just don’t understand—he keeps telling me different things.
LISTENER: He really confuses you (direct) *OR* You’re feeling frustrated (indirect)
 - Reflecting experience: expressing what you see, including any incongruities between words, emotions, and actions
STUDENT: (*crying*) It’s really not very important.
LISTENER: You say it’s not important, but you’re crying, so you seem upset.
4. *Clarifying/Perception Checking*—asking for confirmation of what you heard. Involves first making a statement using paraphrasing or reflecting then asking the other person if your statement was accurate. For example, “You seem angry—is that the case?”

Things to Avoid When Serving as a Listener

1. *Don’t* give advice! It is okay to inform the student of available resources, but beware of telling the student what they “should” or “have to” do, as this is rarely perceived as helpful.
2. *Don’t* be confrontative. In particular, asking “why” questions or starting sentences with “you” can sound accusatory. Avoid any suggestion that you blame the student.
3. *Don’t* presume to interpret the student’s situation. Remember, you are acting as a *listener*, not a counselor; it is not your job to tell the student what you think is wrong with them.