



Active Listening Techniques

What is Active Listening?

Active listening intentionally focuses on the speaker in order to understand what he or she is saying. As the listener, you should be able to repeat back in your own words what they have said to their satisfaction. This does not mean you agree with the person, but rather understand what they are saying.

What Can You Do to Show Participants You Are Actively Listening?

As the facilitator, it is important to convey that you are listening to the group's feedback. Below are several strategies you can adopt to show participants that you are listening and that you care about what they say.

Good listeners:

- Face the speaker and maintain eye contact (to the degree it is comfortable).
- Respond appropriately and show that they understand. Murmuring "uh-huh" and "um-hmm," nodding, raising your eyebrows and asking direct prompts can be helpful.
- Focus on what the speaker is saying, not what they plan to say next. The conversation should flow naturally after the speaker makes his/her point.
- Avoid chiming in with their own similar experience or advice.
- Try to feel and understand what the speaker is feeling.
- Paraphrase what they heard by saying, "so, you're saying..." or "what I'm hearing you say is..." or "so, if I understand correctly..." and restate key points.
- Ask questions that may provide more information.

How Do I Balance Active Listening with Assessment Expectations?

While it is important to demonstrate active listening skills, it's probably inevitable that you, as the facilitator, will also feel pressure to keep the process moving along in a timely manner. As discussed in the *Facilitator's Guide*, the ground rules and tone you set at the beginning of the meeting can help you and the group strike a good balance. Periodically reminding the group of the ground rule and expectations can be helpful.