

Listening exercise



These exercises will really heighten your awareness of your listening skills and, most importantly, HOW to actively listen more.

Exercise 1: Practice with a friend

Set a timer for 90 seconds and have your partner talk about any subject. You listen without interrupting. When the timer beeps, she stops talking and you summarize her words and any feelings expressed. When finished discuss the experience. What was it like for you? What was it like for your partner? Reverse roles and repeat the exercise.

You may be surprised to find yourself struggling to wait for the beep before you talk. This discovery could strengthen your motivation to control the urge to talk. Also, your agreement to summarize what you heard will most likely cause you to pay more attention to the other person's words and overall expression.

Exercise 2: Exercise in self-awareness and choice

The next time you are listening and find yourself wanting to talk about your interests, but the talker has not paused, continue listening. If the other has paused, wait two or three seconds. If she/he resumes talking, continue listening. If she does not resume, talk. The reason for waiting is that the talker might be pausing to organize her thoughts before continuing to talk.

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Exercise 3: Practice listening & summarizing

When the talker pauses for more than two or three seconds and you are ready to talk about your interests, summarize instead. If he or she resumes talking, continue listening. If she or he does not resume, talk.

The talker may feel encouraged to continue talking after knowing you understood her words. Or she may pause because she is not sure you want to hear more but is reluctant to ask. However, when you summarize her words instead of talk about your interests, she may conclude you want to hear more.

Summarizing is, of course, acknowledging the talker's words, not his feelings. For this exercise summarizing what was said is sufficient. It makes the exercise easy to do and has value. Letting the talker know you heard and understand his or her feelings is a plus if it is apparent and easy to do.

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