

Successful Personal and Professional relationships require a high level of listening ability.

One of the biggest obstacles to listening is the desire to think ahead and plan the next question. When we do this, we not only fail to listen, we also give out verbal and non-verbal signals which indicate a desire to interrupt.

Active listening is not just sitting in silence while someone else talks.

The skills of active listening can be summed up in a mnemonic:



- L**ook interested
- I**nquire with questions
- S**tay on target
- T**est understanding
- E**valuate the message
- N**eutralise your feelings

Look interested: Whether or not you are listening, your posture and body language will send messages. A very casual, "laid back" posture may be your natural style, but an upright, slightly leaning forward posture will indicate interest. Good eye contact and occasional nodding will reinforce the message.

Inquire with questions: Clarification (rather than challenging) with questions will confirm your desire to understand fully.

Stay on target: Do not be tempted to stray off the main subject - this would undermine the original purpose of the meeting.

Test understanding: Summarising as a means of testing your understanding will prove that you have been listening and assimilating.

Evaluate the message: What are the implications of the message? Reflect these back to ensure that the impact of the message is right.

Neutralise your feelings: The message might generate strong feelings in you. If you show your feelings you may bias the message or block it completely. React later.