

Effective Listening Skills

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Just because we have ears, doesn't mean that we know how to listen. Students often find their attention wanders during class, so their class notes are incomplete. Improving your listening skills will improve not only your study skills and your grades, but also your personal relationships and your career success.

Effective listeners, and successful students, prepare in advance for classes or meetings, participate actively, and use note taking to process what they hear and to stay focused on the speaker.

Top Ten Tips for Effective Listening:

1. Be well rested and avoid high-carbohydrate foods just before class.
Listening requires sustained energy, and some courses have three-hour lectures (eating an apple will give you healthier energy than drinking caffeinated beverages).
2. Preview notes and textbooks before arriving at class.
3. Arrive early for class. Bring with you your textbook and notebook, pencils and highlighters, and a recording device, if permitted. Choose a seat with minimal distractions (T-Zone, across the front and down the middle).
4. Ask your instructor in advance if you wish to record the lecture. Plan ahead for battery life, and avoid interrupting the instructor.
5. Clear your mind. If you have things to do, make a to-do list and put it aside. Turn off your cell phone (not silence mode, OFF).
6. Open your notebook, copy key words or topics from the board or slides onto a new page in your notebook. If the instructor announces an outline for the day, or key topics, copy those down as well. Don't prejudge the instructor: regardless of your personal opinion of the instructor, you need to learn what he/she is teaching.
7. Process the lecture while you listen and take notes. How is it organized?
Why has the instructor chosen to cover topics in that order? How does the new information connect with the previous lecture? Make notes in the margins as you think about the lecture.
8. Most people find their attention wandering after about 20 minutes of listening. Your mind moves much faster than the speaker's voice. Listen "between the lines" and use note taking to keep yourself engaged.
9. Pay attention to cues by the instructor that something is especially important. Certain key phrases, writing on the board, computer-aided graphics, or changes in tone usually indicates something is especially important or difficult to understand.
10. Ask the instructor questions to clarify difficult topics.