

Mastery of Active Listening Skills

Listening is a critical aspect of effective communication. Regardless of your score, the following exercises will help you become a better listener. Try practicing all of the active listening skills that follow, then select and use the one with which you feel most comfortable.

PARAPHRASING

In paraphrasing, you restate, in your own words, what you think the other person just said. You can use such phrases as “In other words...” or “What I am hearing you say is....”

In the following spaces, try to paraphrase what the speaker is saying.

What the speaker says	How you could paraphrase
<i>“I think I am going to leave him.”</i>	<i>“What I hear you saying is that you are going to ask for a divorce!”</i>
<i>“My partner never listens to me.”</i>	
<i>“I desperately need a vacation.”</i>	
<i>“I hate my job.”</i>	
<i>“I can’t decide if I should go to the party.”</i>	



(Mastery of Active Listening Skills continued)

REFLECTION OF FEELINGS

In reflection of feelings, you restate what the person has said to you much like paraphrasing. However, in this skill you restate what you think the speaker is feeling.

In the following spaces, try to reflect the feelings of the speaker.

What the speaker says	How you could reflect feelings
<i>"I think I am going to leave him."</i>	<i>"You sound very frustrated!"</i>
<i>"My partner never listens to me."</i>	
<i>"I desperately need a vacation."</i>	
<i>"I hate my job."</i>	
<i>"I can't decide if I should go to the party."</i>	

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of...

Methodology

The study was conducted using a quantitative research design...

Data was collected from a sample of 100 participants...

The results of the study indicate that there is a significant...

There was a significant difference between the two groups...

The findings suggest that the intervention had a positive...

The results show that the majority of participants reported...

It is concluded that the study supports the hypothesis that...

Further research is needed to explore the long-term effects...

The study was limited by the sample size and the duration...

Future studies should consider a larger and more diverse...

In conclusion...

The overall findings of this study are consistent with previous...

SECTION I: ACTIVITY HANDOUTS

(Mastery of Active Listening Skills continued)

CLARIFICATION

In clarification, you tell the other person what you thought you heard, learn whether you were right or wrong, and then ask questions to clarify.

In the following spaces, try to clarify what the speaker is saying.

What the speaker says	How you could clarify what was said
<i>"I think I am going to leave him."</i>	<i>"You don't think it's worth staying to try and work things out. Is that accurate?"</i>
<i>"My partner never listens to me."</i>	
<i>"I desperately need a vacation."</i>	
<i>"I hate my job."</i>	
<i>"I can't decide if I should go to the party."</i>	



(Mastery of Active Listening Skills continued)

BODY LANGUAGE

Showing active listening through your body language conveys the message that you are interested and listening, encouraging the speaker to tell you more. Some suggestions for effective body language include the following:

- Maintain eye contact
- Move closer to the person, but do not cross over any personal boundaries
- Lean forward if you are sitting
- Nod from time-to-time
- Say things like “yes” or “uh huh”
- Keep your posture open to the person by keeping your arms unfolded and uncrossed
- Keep distractions to a minimum

When you are communicating with other people, which of the above body language cues do you maintain?

When you are communicating with other people, which of the above body language cues do you need to do more often?



Stages of Listening

- Hear a message from another person
- Make some meaning from the message
- Evaluate the message based on your needs and situation
- Respond to the message, either verbally or nonverbally

Communication Skills Scale

	Very True	Somewhat True	Not True
1. I deliver clear messages to other people	3	2	1
2. When a conversation turns to feelings, I often change the subject	1	2	3
3. I am afraid to hurt the feelings of others	1	2	3
4. I am good at reading non-verbal messages	3	2	1
5. I know how to deliver messages that people can understand	3	2	1
6. I do not like to discuss sensitive issues	1	2	3
7. I am not afraid to express a differing opinion	3	2	1
8. I finish other peoples' sentences for them	1	2	3
9. People do not always get what I say to them	1	2	3
10. My emotions generally match my words	3	2	1
11. If I need to, I will stand up for myself	3	2	1
12. I let others speak without interrupting them	3	2	1
13. I am able to express my ideas clearly	3	2	1
14. I have trouble expressing my feelings	1	2	3
15. I am not as assertive as I could be	1	2	3
16. I ask questions when I do not understand	3	2	1
17. I have difficulty expressing my feelings	1	2	3
18. Often, I become angry when talking to others	1	2	3
19. I have trouble asking for what I want	1	2	3
20. I often pretend to listen, even though my mind wanders	1	2	3
21. I check to make sure people understand me	3	2	1
22. I can detect the emotional moods of others	3	2	1

(Continued on the next page)



(Communication Skills Scale continued)

	Very True	Somewhat True	Not True
23. I will express an opinion that is different from the group	3	2	1
24. I rarely jump to conclusions	3	2	1
25. I use "I" statements to deliver criticism to others	3	2	1
26. I get upset if others disagree with me	1	2	3
27. I do not like to anger others	1	2	3
28. I have trouble reading between the lines	1	2	3
29. I will ask for feedback about the messages I communicate	3	2	1
30. I often raise my voice, even though I am not aware of it at the time	1	2	3
31. I rarely ask questions so I will not look unintelligent	1	2	3
32. I always try to put myself in the speaker's shoes	3	2	1
33. I communicate nonverbally to match what I am saying	3	2	1
34. I try to avoid emotional situations	1	2	3
35. I am not hesitant to tell others how I feel	3	2	1
36. I get distracted easily	1	2	3
37. I often have to repeat what I say	1	2	3
38. I often change the subject when discussing touchy topics	1	2	3
39. I will not admit I am angry with someone	1	2	3
40. I am thinking about what I will say while people are talking to me	1	2	3
41. I only speak for myself, not everybody	3	2	1
42. I can solve problems without getting emotional	3	2	1
43. I cannot express my opinions if others do not share them	1	2	3
44. I listen to bits and pieces of most conversations	1	2	3

(Go to the Scoring Directions on the next page)

Communication Skills Scale Scoring Directions

The Communications Skills Scale is designed to measure how well you are able to communicate with other people. Four important aspects of communicating effectively are:

- sending accurate messages
- controlling and discussing emotions
- being assertive when you need to and
- listening actively to what others are saying

These make up the four scales on the assessment. Scales are used to group items and help you to explore your specific communication skills more easily.

Scoring the assessment is very easy. Look at the questions you just answered.

Use the spaces below to record the number that you circled on each individual item of the assessment.

Then, calculate the totals for each of the columns (scales) and put that total underneath each column.

SCALE I	SCALE II	SCALE III	SCALE IV
1 _____	2 _____	3 _____	4 _____
5 _____	6 _____	7 _____	8 _____
9 _____	10 _____	11 _____	12 _____
13 _____	14 _____	15 _____	16 _____
17 _____	18 _____	19 _____	20 _____
21 _____	22 _____	23 _____	24 _____
25 _____	26 _____	27 _____	28 _____
29 _____	30 _____	31 _____	32 _____
33 _____	34 _____	35 _____	36 _____
37 _____	38 _____	39 _____	40 _____
41 _____	42 _____	43 _____	44 _____
I. Total	II. Total	III. Total	IV. Total
_____	_____	_____	_____
Messages	Emotions	Assertiveness	Listening



Profile Interpretation

Communication is the essence of social interaction and often determines how successful you are in your life and your career. Effective communication affects the impression you make on other people, the level of your self-esteem, your ability to manage situations and how you adjust socially in life. This assessment helps you explore how effective you are in four critical components of effective communication. Look at the profile interpretation materials below.

Individual Scale Score	Total Score All 4 Scales	Result	Indications
11 – 18	44 – 73	Low	You do not, at this point in time, have very effective communication skills. Think of different ways that you can develop and use communication skills more effectively.
19 – 25	74 – 102	Moderate	You have pretty good communication skills, but you could use some improvement. Think of ways to incorporate more effective communication skills into your conversations with other people.
26 – 33	103 – 132	High	You use effective communication skills a great deal of the time. Continue to use these effective communication skills when speaking with other people.

Regardless of your score on the Communications Skills Scale, low, moderate or high, you will benefit from doing all of the following exercises which have been designed to help you improve your communication skills.

I. Messages

Working on your communications skills will ensure that you send clear messages and that they are completely understood by other people. Miscommunication is the cause of many arguments and fights. Specific skills can be learned so others will understand your messages. To be more effective in communicating with others, remember the following:

- When sending messages, use words like I, me, and my to communicate your message. In this way, you own your messages that you share with other people. The use of words like they or some people are ineffective ways to communicate to others. Speak for yourself!
- Look at the person and speak to him or her directly. Do not repress your feelings. Unexpressed feelings have a tendency to blow up into larger conflicts.
- Express your feelings. See examples of how to express your feelings below. In the boxes on the left-hand side of the table, list people to whom you would like to express your feelings. In the right-hand column, express your feelings to that person.

Who I would like to express my feelings	What I would like to say to that person
<i>My co-worker</i>	<i>I feel angry when you don't pick me up on time for work.</i>
<i>My spouse</i>	<i>I get upset when you break your word.</i>



II. Emotions

In effective relationships, people are able to express themselves by sending emotional messages. This can be difficult because they force you to disclose personal information about yourself. This can be very risky. Complete the following statements to think about the emotional messages you would like to send to other people. List the person's name first and then complete the statement:

" _____ , I get scared when you _____

_____ "

" _____ , I feel hurt when you _____

_____ "

" _____ , I feel unappreciated when you _____

_____ "

" _____ , I am sad when you _____

_____ "

" _____ , I get excited when you _____

_____ "

III. Assertiveness

All people have the right to express their desires, needs and wants and expect other people to treat them with respect and dignity. AGGRESSIVE people will infringe on the rights of others and express their feelings through insults, sarcasm, hostile statements and put-downs. On the other hand, ASSERTIVE people describe their feelings and thoughts directly to other people in an honest way that enables them to act in their own best interest, allows them to stand up for themselves and exercise their personal rights without denying the rights of others. Assertive communication takes some practice. Complete the following statements:

Why do you have a hard time expressing your desires, needs and wants?

How has your aggressive style caused problems for you . . .

with your friends?

in your social life?

at work?

(Continued on the next page)

What I Want

To assert yourself, you must know what you want in your life. By establishing what you really want, you will be able to assert yourself when you need to. You will know what is worth fighting for. You will also know from what to simply walk away.

In each of the boxes below, list what you want in each of the categories:

Personal	
Financial	
Career	
Family	
Friends	
Spirituality	
Community	
Other	



Non-Assertive Situations

Identify situations in which you need to be more assertive.

By becoming more aware of those situations in which you are not assertive, you can practice your assertiveness training skills.

For each of the situations listed below, describe how you show a lack of assertiveness.

Situations in which I lack assertiveness	How I am non-assertive
Saying NO to others	
Asking for favors	
Disagreeing with others' opinions	
Taking charge of a situation	
Social situations	
Responding to put-downs	
Stating my opinion	
Sexual situations	
Taking time for myself	
Speaking in front of groups	
Others (list them)	

People With Whom I Am Non-Assertive

Identify people with whom you need to be more assertive.

By becoming more aware of those people, you can practice your assertiveness training skills.

For each of the people listed below, describe how you show a lack of assertiveness.

People with whom I am non-assertive	How I am non-assertive
Mother	
Father	
Significant Other	
Co-Workers	
Children	
Sales Clerks	
Religious Leaders	
Authority Figures	
Neighbors	
Large Groups	
Supervisors	



IV. Listening

Active listening involves an awareness of what another person is saying to you or asking you to do.

Use your active listening skills to make sure that you understand the true meaning of the request or statement. Following are some of the blocks to listening:

INADEQUATE LISTENING – It is easy to get distracted when other people are talking. This includes such things as being too involved with your own thoughts, preoccupied with your own needs and problems or too eager to help the other person. It might be that the social and cultural differences between you and the other person are too great.

List times when you feel you easily get distracted when talking with others:

To what specific people do you find it hard to listen?

JUDGMENTAL LISTENING – Listening with the intent of judging a person can hinder your ability to listen to them. You may find that you are judging what the person is saying as good or bad, right or wrong; you are not listening with empathy. It is important to set aside your judgments about the person until you can better understand him or her, his or her world and point of view.

List times when you feel you start to value-judge the other person:

What specific people do find yourself evaluating?

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SECTION III: ACTIVITY HANDOUTS

(Listening continued)

DAYDREAMING – Everyone’s attention will wander from time to time. If you find yourself having a hard time listening to someone, it is probably a sign that you are avoiding or are uninterested in the person or certain topics of conversation.

List times when you feel your attention wandering:

When your mind wanders, which specific people are you talking to? Why does it happen?

REHEARSING – Any time you ask yourself the question “How should I respond to what this person is saying?” you distract yourself from what the person says. As you get better at active listening, your response just comes naturally. It is best to listen intently to the person, the themes, and core messages related to their words. Then allow your intuition to provide you with a response.

List times when you find yourself rehearsing what you will say in conversations:

Which specific people are you talking with when you find yourself rehearsing your conversation?



I Need to Improve

Which communication skills do you need most to improve?

How will you do that?

Messages: _____

Emotions: _____

Assertiveness: _____

Listening: _____

Being More Assertive

How are you going to be more assertive?
With which people and in what situations?

Messages: _____

Emotions: _____

Assertiveness: _____

Listening: _____



Clear Messages

How will you ensure that people get clear messages from you and that you truly listen to what others are saying?