

CHAPTER 2 TEACHING SUGGESTIONS AND RESOURCES

Professionalism: Team, Meeting, Listening, Nonverbal, and Etiquette Skills

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter emphasizes the importance of soft skills and why they are becoming increasingly important in our knowledge-based economy. Soft skills include oral and written communications, listening proficiency, nonverbal communication, the ability to work in teams, and etiquette expertise. By developing soft skills, students will increase their ability to succeed in today's competitive work environment. With the increased use of teams in the workplace, it's particularly important for students to understand the roles of team members and how to contribute to the productivity of the team. This chapter also describes effective practices for planning and participating in virtual meetings. To familiarize students with technologies used to connect employees around the globe, Chapter 2 also describes the tools used to connect virtual teams, including voice conferencing, videoconferencing, Web conferencing, instant messaging, blogs, and wikis.

Because listening is usually the least developed area of communication, the chapter also describes effective listening techniques and stresses that effective listening skills are essential for workplace success. Finally, the chapter stresses the importance of paying attention to and interpreting the meaning of what others are saying, both verbally and nonverbally, and gaining a competitive edge by demonstrating professionalism and business etiquette skills.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Explain the importance of professionalism, soft skills, and teamwork in today's workplace.
2. Understand how you can contribute positively to team performance, including resolving workplace conflicts, avoiding groupthink, and reaching group decisions.
3. Discuss effective techniques for planning and participating in face-to-face workplace meetings.
4. Describe effective practices and technologies for planning and participating in virtual meetings.
5. Explain and implement active listening techniques.
6. Understand how the functions and forms of nonverbal communication can help you advance your career.
7. Enhance your competitive edge by developing professionalism and business etiquette skills.

WHAT'S NEW IN THIS CHAPTER

- Focused chapter on professional workplace skills to help students make a smooth transition from the classroom to the business world
- Distinguished between face-to-face and virtual meetings, emphasizing the latter because virtual meetings reduce travel costs, lessen employee fatigue, and connect remote workers
- Instructions and Web screenshot added, illustrating the use of digital calendars to schedule meetings so that students will know how to use this electronic tool
- Web screenshot added to illustrate e-mail meeting summary template so that students see how savvy companies are using digital tools to summarize key points and note action items to monitor
- Many tips and specific ground rules provided on how to plan and interact professionally during virtual meetings
- Importance of soft skills and professionalism in regard to being hired and promoted emphasized

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Making It Relevant

In the college classroom, most students are expected to work in pairs or teams on a weekly basis. They will need to determine roles, establish responsibilities, resolve conflict, behave professionally, and produce results. This chapter will give students the tools they need to be productive and respectful team members during their college careers. Developing these skills in college will give students an advantage when they enter the workplace.



Interactive Lectures: Let's Discuss

The following questions are designed to promote critical thinking and encourage lively discussions in the classroom. Student responses will vary; some suggested answers are provided.

1. **Four employees of a design firm have formed a team to plan a new business presentation to a prestigious client. The employees represent four areas of the business: design, production, finance, and marketing. The finance manager and marketing manager have a heated disagreement about the objectives of the presentation and the cost of the proposed marketing plan. Tension is so high that the team leader steps in to help address the conflict.**

What stage of team development is this team experiencing?

This team is demonstrating characteristics of a team in the *storming* phase of development where conflict about the team's goals and members' roles may erupt. When this occurs, a good team leader will step in to set offer suggestions for getting the team back on track and progressing toward its goals.

2. How should a manager address conflict that is a result of differences in culture, gender, age, or experience?

The more diverse the workplace becomes, the greater potential for conflict based on differences. Managers need to become more active listeners as opposed to just barking out orders. In addition to the strategies listed in the chapter, active listeners should ask open-ended questions such as, “Ty, when Jake suggested we send letters to all our customers about the cellphone recall, what was your reaction?” Then, the manager should let Ty speak without assuming she knows his answer and without passing judgment.

Adubato, S. (2007, April 8). Asking the right questions can help with conflict. *The Star-Ledger*. Retrieved from <http://www.gale.com/BusinessRC/>.

3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of groupthink in organizations?

Advantages

- Groupthink reflects the team’s desire for cohesiveness and harmony, a desirable trait for teams working toward a shared purpose.

Disadvantages

- Group members are reluctant to express opinions, resulting in poorer decisions.
- Group members fail to check alternatives, are biased in collecting information, and fail to develop a contingency plan.

4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of videoconferencing?

Advantages

1. Videoconferencing allows people who are geographically spread out to collaborate and reach a decision.
2. Videoconferencing is more effective than conference calls because it allows participants to view facial expressions and body language.
3. Breakthroughs in video, audio, and broadband technologies create meeting experiences that are so lifelike that participants who are thousands of miles apart look like they’re in the same room.
4. Videoconferencing reduces travel time, travel expenses, and employee fatigue.

Disadvantages

1. Videoconferencing systems are expensive. Conventional videoconference rooms may cost \$5,000–\$80,000 per room.
2. Videoconferencing is still not better than face-to-face meetings.



Classroom Activities

Topic Emphasis

You will want to focus on team communication skills: collaboration, team roles, dealing with conflict, handling dysfunctional group members, and meeting tips. If you assign group projects as part of the course, stress to students that they have the opportunity to practise team communication skills during the term as they carry out their projects. Focus on the importance of paying attention to and interpreting the meaning of what others are saying, both verbally and nonverbally, and being able to collaborate on written and oral presentations. Being able to work successfully in teams is one of the keys to career success.

In addition, focus on the importance of good listening and nonverbal skills in the workplace and on how to develop those skills. This is also a good chapter to begin the important topic of cultural differences; nonverbal communication, especially, varies greatly from culture to culture. Throughout discussion of this chapter, have students share their experiences with nonverbal communication while living or traveling in another country. These discussions will provide a good basis for Chapter 3, “Intercultural Communication.”

Chapter Presentation Suggestions

LONG-TERM GROUP ROLES

To help your students gain a sense of the roles group members can play in a long-term committee or task force, you may give them the following guides:

Team Project: Job Descriptions

1. Manager, small group dynamics expert

- Conducts meetings effectively
- Delegates work appropriately and fairly
- E-mails the CEO (instructor) as required with team progress report or agenda and minutes
- Sets and distributes agenda
- Attends and contributes at all group meetings
- Participates effectively at group presentations
- Completes group assessment documents competently
- Follows up on group decisions

2. Assistant Manager, small group dynamics expert

- Fills in for the manager
- Secures meeting rooms in a timely fashion
- Informs members of changes in a timely fashion
- Assists manager as needed, especially in following up group decisions
- Collects and distributes minutes
- Attends and contributes at all group meetings
- Participates effectively at group presentations
- Completes group assessment documents competently

3. Document Expert, word processing expert

- Prepares final copies of documents effectively and on time
- Collects copies of all group documents and files
- Instructs group in word processing as needed
- Attends and contributes at all group meetings
- Participates effectively at group presentations
- Completes group assessment documents competently

4. Multimedia Specialist, presentation software expert

- Prepares audio-visual projects effectively and on time
- Collects copies of all presentation software documents and files
- Instructs group in presentation software as needed
- Attends and contributes at all group meetings
- Participates effectively at group presentations
- Completes group assessment documents competently

5. Senior Researcher, print, Internet, electronic research expert

- Organizes research projects effectively and on time
- Ensures that research documents and files have appropriate formatting
- Instructs group in research methods as needed
- Attends and contributes at all group meetings
- Participates effectively at group presentations
- Completes group assessment documents competently

SHORT-TERM GROUP ROLES

When you place students in small, temporary groups in the classroom, assign them the following roles. Encourage students to adopt different roles in different groups or to rotate roles.

Group Roles

1. Facilitator

- Gets the task at hand or project started
- Keeps group focused on the purpose
- Keeps meeting running smoothly
- Keeps members on task

2. Recordkeeper

- Keeps a record of the meeting
- Reports the results of the group to the rest of the class

3. Timekeeper

- Keeps track of time during the meeting
- Helps facilitator keep meeting on track
- Ends meeting on time

4. Encourager

- Makes sure that all members are participating
- Helps members deal with conflicts

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

To help your students learn how to effectively manage and take part in productive meetings, you should introduce them to the basics of parliamentary procedure. Share the following the guidelines with them:

Minimum Guidelines for Using Parliamentary Procedure

Running Meetings

1. Call meeting to order
2. Read minutes of last meeting
3. Hear reports of treasurer and other officers
4. Process committee reports
5. Consider old business
6. Entertain new business
7. Introduce program for meeting
8. Adjourn meeting

Making Decisions

1. Chair entertains new business in the form of main motion
2. Member seconds main motion
3. Main motion is debated with chair controlling discussion
4. Chair calls for a vote
5. Motion passes or is defeated

Protecting Individual Rights

1. Appoint a knowledgeable, objective parliamentarian to enforce the rules
2. Rise to a point of information if you do not understand discussion at hand
3. Rise to a point of parliamentary inquiry to ask the parliamentarian about correct procedures
4. Call for a division of the house if a voice vote is unclear
5. Appeal the decision of the chair and ask members to vote on whether the chair is right

GRAPEVINE DEMONSTRATION

First, write a simple one- or two-sentence message or quotation on an index card. Next, whisper the message in the ear of a student at the front of your classroom. Have each student pass the message throughout the entire class by whispering it to the next student.

After the last student has been told the message, have that individual repeat what he/she understood the message to be. Tell students the original message that was written on your card. Usually the message bears little resemblance to the original message written on the card. You'll want to stress to students that in their business lives, trusting the accuracy of the grapevine can at times be dangerous.

LISTENING EXERCISES

You might want to try the following listening activities. You will find that students can be very astute behavioural observers.

- a. Have students spend some time in another class observing the listening habits and nonverbal communication of students; they can choose to observe one particular individual or several different individuals. Then have students comment in memo form on the habits, both good and bad, that were exhibited by their peers. Be sure that the subjects of the memos are discussed anonymously.
- b. Have students spend some time during the week observing a particular professor and his/her listening skills and nonverbal communication skills. Then have students discuss their findings in a memo. Be sure to have them discuss their professors anonymously.

CHAPTER REVIEW, CRITICAL THINKING, AND ACTIVITIES

At the end of the chapter, several hands-on activities are available for students. The answers are provided in Part Four of the Instructor's Manual.



Online Class Activity

This discussion board activity will help students analyze and appreciate the importance of good communication skills online and should result in an animated online discussion.

Web Site Design Critique Discussion Instructions

The appearance of our documents is one way we communicate nonverbally. The appearance of a Web site is no different.

1. Find one example of each of the following: a very well-designed Web site and a very poorly designed Web site.
2. Post the URLs for your findings to the class discussion form (as “live” hyperlinks if possible) so that other students can visit the sites to see if they agree.
3. Respond to a least two peers’ posts and comment on the design of the Web sites they have posted.

Sample evaluation rubrics for assessing online discussions are available in Part Two of this Instructor’s Manual.

The Technology Link

With the current emphasis on technology in the work world, it is essential for business communicators to be able to use technology effectively to communicate. The exercises in this section will help students develop the technical skills they’ll need to succeed.

1. *Digital Network/Class Mailing List.* When you assign students to groups, require them to submit agendas and minutes of meetings to you or the class mailing list via e-mail or digital network (see The Technology Link, Chapter 1, for information on digital networks and mailing lists). You may wish to give the following guides to your students.

GUIDES FOR AGENDAS AND MINUTES

Agenda

1. Specify date, place, starting time, and ending time.
2. Provide a statement of overall mission and purpose of the meeting.
3. Identify who will attend.
4. List the topics to be covered.
5. Identify the approximate amount of time for each topic.
6. Identify the pre-meeting action or reading expected of each member.
7. Distribute the agenda at least a week ahead of time.

Minutes

1. Provide date, time, and location of the meeting.
 2. Maintain an objective tone (no editorializing).
 3. Summarize when possible.
 4. Express motions and amendments precisely.
 5. Record time of adjournment, and if appropriate, the time of the next meeting.
-
2. *Virtual Meetings.* Have students participate in an online virtual meeting using an online meeting/chat room. Small groups of students should come up with the agenda and purpose of the meeting (or you can assign), schedule the meeting electronically, participate in the meeting, and send a follow-up report to you or to the class mailing list via e-mail. Two good online sources for electronic meetings are WebEx (<http://www.webex.com>) and GoToMeeting (<https://www.gotomeeting.com/>). Both sites offer free trials.
 3. *Class Discussion Board.* If you have set up an online discussion board for your class, set up private topic areas for the groups in your class. Here group members can asynchronously discuss group projects and other class assignments among themselves, without the entire class seeing their postings. These private areas also allow an excellent area for group members to share documents with each other outside of class. (See The Technology Link, Chapter 1, for information on discussion boards).

REFLECTIONS ON TEACHING

Student-Facilitated Meetings—A Reflection

Once all of the meetings have been conducted in class, have your students take a few minutes to write an anonymous reflection paper. (For online classes, you can set up an anonymous discussion forum). This allows the students to think about how the meetings went and provides you with valuable feedback about their learning experience. Depending on the result, you can revisit concepts, like dealing with conflict or how to effectively share responsibilities with a team member. You will also gain insight on how to improve or change the meetings assignment in the future.

Suggested reflection questions for the students are as follows:

1. What do you feel went well during the meetings?
2. Did any challenges arise during the meetings?
3. Is there anything you would do differently? Why?
4. What was your most valuable experience as a meeting participant?
5. Do you feel as though you can successfully run a meeting now?
6. Additional comments/thoughts:

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



IMPROVING LISTENING SKILLS: METHODS, ACTIVITIES, EVALUATIONS, AND RESOURCES

Tom Marshall and Jim Vincent
Robert Morris University (PA)
in conjunction with Dr. Mary Ellen Guffey, Thomson/South-Western

The International Listening Association defines listening as “the process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages.”

1. Introduction

Listening is more important in the professions than many business communication texts acknowledge. Our task as business communication teachers is to move students from their natural egocentrism as writers, speakers, and listeners to understanding that audiences are multiple, complex, and varied. Only after students are aware of the nature of audiences can they develop the skills to deal ethically and effectively with them.

It is important for us to emphasize that listening strategies are so intertwined with leadership and personal social styles that one's success as a professional largely depends on how well one really can “hear” the other. Many gender and diversity problems arise in the workplace because people acting in good faith just don't know how to listen to each other resulting from the many psychological, political, social, and cultural barriers that egocentricity keeps in place. Because we need to teach our students about barriers to good listening and effective strategies for listening, we offer you these activities.

“The average person spends from 42 to 60 percent of daily communication time listening (Purdy). Yet, most people are inefficient listeners; they forget, ignore, or misunderstand up to 75 percent of what they hear (Nichols).” Cited in Patricia A. Lynott. (1998, June). Teaching business communication in an accelerated program. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 22. See also Marjorie Brody. (2004, May). Learn to listen. *Incentive*, 57.

2. Creating a Positive, Proactive Listening Classroom in Business Communication

While listening skills are employed constantly in the business communication classroom as well as in all business contexts, these skills are seldom consciously taught or even acknowledged. Because listening seems such a natural, obvious activity, like breathing or walking, teachers often take it for granted. In a business environment that is increasingly multicultural, fast paced, and communication intensive, listening has never been more important. Probably the most important insight that we can share with our students is that listening is not a natural activity but rather a purposeful act that can be improved through modelling, instruction, practice, and assessment.

To that end, business communication teachers should work hard at modelling effective listening skills as well as establishing a positive listening environment in the classroom. Some simple strategies are effective in accomplishing these goals. Teachers should:

- Listen carefully as students introduce themselves and pass on information about themselves in initial classes. Then when the teacher is able to use a student's name or item of information in a subsequent class, they get the idea that such attention to detail is important.
- Learn student names because names are of utmost importance. In addition, by acknowledging questions and suggestions, even repeating concerns back to the audience, teachers show students that their ideas are taken seriously.
- Encourage students to restate a class member's position before engaging in refutation. Doing so will also help develop a positive listening environment.

In addition to modelling behaviours, teachers should make sure that physical conditions are right for listening activities. They can try to cut down on extraneous noise where possible. That means air conditioning, blowers, overhead fans and coolers, and other distractions must be kept to a minimum. If some areas of a classroom are noisier than others, sometimes baffles, portable walls, or insulation can be used to cut down on extraneous noise. When committed teachers emphasize listening, responsive students most often refrain from idle talk and buzz. Now there is a reason for them to concentrate.

Nonverbal behaviours help also in establishing a positive listening environment. When a teacher or presenter gets out from behind a podium, the audience can observe all aspects of body language. When the face of the speaker is clearly visible, listeners can gauge seriousness and demeanour. Teachers should create seating that allows students to speak directly to others in the classroom and should encourage students to speak clearly and singly so that all others can hear what is transpiring. By modelling effective listening skills, by creating a physical space with sound acoustics, and by encouraging constructive classroom interaction, a business communication teacher can create the kind of classroom that leads to superior listening skills.

3. Keys to Effective Listening

- Prepare yourself to listen.
- Look for areas of interest with the person who is speaking.
 - Judge content, not delivery; and avoid premature judgments.
- Let the speaker finish; don't interrupt.
- Listen for ideas and identify the speaker's evidence.
- Summarize or restate what the speaker is saying.
- Note the larger issues.
 - Be aware of emotions and notice body language as a clue to emotions.
- Be flexible.
- Resist distractions.
- Keep your mind open; try to access the speaker's world, not your own.
- Work at listening.

Three Myths of Listening

Listening is a natural activity.
Hearing and listening are the same thing.
You are speaking to a mass audience.

Three Truths of Listening

Listening is learned.
Telling is not communicating.
You speak to one individual at a time even in large audiences.

4. Learning Objectives of the Activities

Cognitive goals

Students will

- Develop habits of effective listening.
- Accurately summarize and paraphrase information from reading and listening.
- Listen critically, employ and assess nonverbal cues in oral communication, and provide criticism to others in a collaborative and supportive manner.
- Identify and evaluate, through an analysis of oral communication, a communicator's purposes, assumptions, and attitudes, as well as the strengths of arguments and the relevance and appropriateness of evidence in relation to audience, purpose, and situation.
- Enhance listening skills through interacting with foreign speakers with unusual pronunciations.

Affective goal

- Develop understanding and positive attitudes toward listening to the perspectives of others.

5. Activities

The following activities help sharpen students' listening skills. Since several activities may be adapted to different subject matters, you may integrate them throughout the term to reinforce skills and to provide a variety of instruction.

A. Listening Check

Approximate class time: 10–15 minutes

This activity is relatively easy to implement. It involves reading or speaking a short passage relating to the material that is under consideration during class time. You can build a library of good short passages as you develop the assignment from class to class. Newspapers such as *The Globe and Mail* and business news magazines such as *Canadian Business* are good sources for passages. Read the passage and then ask students orally or in writing to answer two short questions:

- 1) What is the thesis of the passage?
- 2) Recall one piece of evidence that supports the thesis.

The Listening Check is also good to test how students are processing class lectures. Near the end of the class session, ask the students to write down the key point of the lecture and one piece of support. Collect the papers to check what they think you are saying. You may find yourself saying, “But that’s not what I meant. That’s not it at all.”

Another variant is to have students in pairs exchange papers and negotiate what they thought they heard. Then have several pairs report to the class to note differences. Correct any misperceptions if need be (and experienced teachers know that misperceptions will occur).

Objective of this activity: After listening to the selected passage, students will accurately summarize and paraphrase its key information.

Evaluation: Assess the quality of a student’s oral and written responses. In the interest of time, you may wish to spot check only students’ written or oral responses. If the spot check reveals weak performance, you may want to do a more thorough review of each student’s written responses.

What you can expect from this activity: Very likely, students will make some predictable mistakes. Difficult or unusual vocabulary items will surely be confusing. You will find, however, that as a result most students will begin to attend more carefully to oral language in the classroom, especially if they know that they will be asked about it. You should seek to help students examine the reasons for mishearings and give them the motivation and tools to create a theory of effective personal listening.

B. Supportive Listening

Approximate class time: 10–15 minutes

The skills practised in this activity are applicable to situations in which there is some degree of inherent conflict, such as job interviews, performance reviews, and negotiations. The important concept practised in the activity is to earn your listener’s goodwill by *showing* that you are listening and not interrupting.

Students work in pairs. One student is chosen to explain a controversial position to the other. The listener has a simple task: to just listen and provide *positive body language* as feedback. Students take turns as speaker and listener. As simple as this sounds, we know that there are those for whom quietly listening will be a challenge. Those who are unfamiliar with support might need training on just how to say things like “Uh, huh.”

Objective of this activity: After listening to the selected passage, students will accurately summarize and paraphrase its key information.

Evaluation: Assess the quality of a student’s oral and written responses. In the interests of time, you may wish to spot check only students’ written or oral responses. If the spot check reveals weak performance, you may want to do a more thorough review of each student’s written responses.

What you can expect from this activity: In this activity, many students will be shocked at the outcome. When a truly attentive listener engages another, the result is almost always extended conversation. Students who have engaged in this activity at our school have reported that they have learned things they never before even suspected. Previously boring friends become interesting, even fascinating. Colleagues at work take on an added dimension. Given the power of conversation, you should warn students to be prepared for sudden revelations. And it is probably a good idea to be prepared to steer the conversation toward safer territory if inappropriate revelations could cause embarrassment.

You also have to watch for other signs to interpret words. Much important meaning is conveyed visually. Finger tapping, a wide-eyed look, a furrowed brow—these mean as much as words do, sometimes more.

A person's posture, for example, can tell you something about his or her attitude. If somebody says, "Well, it doesn't really matter to me," but his or her posture is stiff, knuckles white, eyes intense, and forehead damp, clearly that person is holding back some true feelings. In such a situation, it's important to make the person realize that you want to hear his or her thoughts, that the person has nothing to fear from speaking out. A properly worded statement that shows your interest may put the person at ease. The ability to create rapport that invites open communication is one of the most valuable skills a manager can possess. (Pollock)

C. Characteristic Communication Style

Approximate class time: 20–30 minutes

A variation of Supportive Listening, but a little more difficult, this activity has its roots in discourse analysis. This activity makes the student pay attention to not only what is being said but how, including nonverbal behaviour.

In pairs, each student explains a controversial position—ethical issues work well here—relating to the class subject matter. But rather than argue with each other's positions, students are asked to create a theory of communication about their partner's way of talking and listening. Our experience with narrative—i.e., as listeners to stories—teaches us to listen to the voice of the narrator, and we can use our experience to enhance our teaching in this area. For instance, a person can ask, does my partner begin with a bold statement of position? Does she use an analogy, or a series of analogies? How does he connect one statement with another? Now, after each has studied the other's pattern, can one partner explain what is the "characteristic communication style" of the other?

Here are some features of a characteristic communication style:

- inner consistency (if statements are inconsistent, honesty is problematic; the narrator may be unreliable)
- honesty and candour
- use of euphemism to avoid difficult realities
- use of metaphor as a clue to thought and theme (the connotations evoked tell us about state of mind, themes, and purpose)

- use of opposites and repetitions, positives and negatives, as clues to speaker's value system
- anecdote (storytelling as a clue to character, humour, obsessions)
- bottom line (narrator as literalist, one without imagination, sees things materialistically)
- egocentricity (characters are selfish) vs. concern for others

Objective of this activity: After listening to a speaker, the student will identify and evaluate some features of the speaker's characteristic communication style: purposes, assumptions, and attitudes.

Evaluation: Assess the quality of a student's oral and written responses. Have each partner, in turn, report his or her analysis and have the other comment on the response. In the interests of time in a larger class, you may wish to have only a few teams report.

What you can expect from this activity: This activity requires the ability to form abstract concepts about casual conversations. Students are being asked to listen and then to categorize what they have listened to. Practice can help in developing that important skill. Also, students might not know the meaning of terms like "metaphor," "euphemism," "anecdote," and others. These categories are crucial to completing the tasks. Simple examples will help; asking students to find examples from the popular press as well as from lyrics or commercials will aid in developing understanding. This activity is one of the more difficult but will lead to increased attentiveness.

"Listeners of both genders can improve the likelihood of understanding their partners by asking questions and by checking their perceptions. The term 'active listening' implies that the listening process takes effort and energy. Active listeners participate in a communication encounter both verbally and nonverbally. They may nod their heads, ask for clarification of a point, or paraphrase what they heard to make sure the speaker's message was correctly interpreted (restating what you hear in your own words is commonly referred to as 'reflection'). Most important, listeners must try to see the world from the perspective of the person speaking." (Brownell, 1993)

D. I Know Where You're Coming From

Approximate class time: 5–10 minutes

This is an especially good activity with nontraditional students. The activity helps students understand differences. In business, school, and personal relations, we meet each other in various venues, most not of our choosing. Needless to say, conversants bring to those venues many pieces of baggage that can interfere with effective communication.

In this activity, students work with partners; each explains to the other something about the physical surroundings of his or her “home.” The object is to understand something about the person to whom you are listening. If the speaker has just returned from child care, a tough football practice, a troubled dorm room, a tough job site, or a long involved meeting, then the listeners must make allowances. Listeners should encourage material descriptions. An effective listening strategy involves getting a handle on the environment that speakers are “coming from.”

Objectives of this activity: Students will listen critically, assess nonverbal cues in an oral communication, and respond to another person in a collaborative and supportive manner.

Evaluation: This activity functions more as an “ice-breaker,” so you may not wish to evaluate it except through informal feedback about how the exercise went. To evaluate more formally, have each partner, in turn, report what was learned and have the other partner confirm or deny the accuracy of the response. In the interests of time in a larger class, you may wish to have only a few teams report.

What you can expect from this activity: The purpose of this activity is to develop empathy as a listener. If done properly, the listener can get out of his/her frame of reference and begin to appreciate where the other person is coming from. By describing the material surroundings of the home or workplace, the speaker is giving clues to how a message should be received. All of us know instinctively to ask if a speaker on a telephone is being overheard, or whether a conversant is in a hurry. This exercise takes that one step further. In at least one class at our college, each student was asked to bring a picture of his or her workplace, cubicle, desk, or corner office. These pictures said much about how a message might be developed and received.

E. Prediction, Hypothesis-checking, Revising, Generalizing

Approximate class time: 10–15 minutes if teacher verifies the predictions, longer if students listen to a full speech

Listening is closely related to reading. The following activity focuses on predicting, which is a variation of a reading process strategy. The five processes—prediction, hypothesis, checking, revising, generalizing—involve the mental activities that occur when we read or hear.

One way to introduce the concept is to ask students to practise predicting. After you model the process, read the text of the opening paragraph from a news story or magazine article about a relevant course topic and ask students to predict—based on its rhetorical cues of purpose, emphasis, foreshadowing, and transition—what the story or article will be about. In most stories, many clues indicate where the story is going, and the student will be able to catch many of them. The teacher then can move from print to oral communication. Have students listen to the opening of a short speech (e.g., from a video of a business leader, motivational speaker, political leader—or you read aloud a speech reprinted in *Vital Speeches of the Day*, which includes many speeches of business leaders) and predict its direction. Then, let students listen to the rest of the speech to check predictions.

Objective of this activity: After listening to a selected passage and analyzing its rhetorical cues, students will accurately predict a communicator's purposes, assumptions, and attitudes.

Evaluation: Assess the quality of a student's oral responses. In the interest of time, you may wish to spot check the students' oral responses. If the spot check reveals weak performance, you may want to check more responses or repeat the exercise.

What you can expect from this activity: Many of us have had friends or colleagues who finish our sentences for us. They know what is coming and can't refrain from completing the sentence for themselves. With this activity, students will practise anticipating a speaker's logic as well as rhetorical moves. You can count on students having a good deal of previous experience with this concept. Children know how to anticipate parental objections, employees know how a boss will react, and co-workers can often role play a colleague's response to a given directive. With this activity, students are asked to make real this kind of tacit knowledge in a way that will help them deal more effectively with future listening tasks.

F. Chunking and Relating

Approximate class time: 20–30 minutes

Language is made up of lexical items and syntactic features, that is, “things” and “relationships of things.” This activity involves a speaker, a listener, a judge, and a commentator. Prepare a group of “paddles” with these labels: objection, analogy, statistic, contradiction, thesis, support, restatement. Each of these terms refers to a typical item in a communication situation. As students view or listen to a discussion, one student is chosen as judge to handle the paddles. As the conversation proceeds, the judge holds up the paddle to indicate the item—objection, analogy, statistic, contradiction, thesis, support, or restatement. Other students watch carefully; and after the exercise is over, they analyze the choices made by the judge. This exercise encourages active listening.

Objective of this activity: After listening to a selected passage and analyzing its rhetorical cues, students will accurately predict a communicator's purposes, assumptions, and attitudes.

Evaluation: Assess the quality of students' oral responses. In the interest of time, you may wish to spot check the students' oral responses. If the spot check reveals weak performance, you may want to check more responses or repeat the exercise.

What you can expect from this activity: To some, this activity might seem unnecessarily cumbersome. Using cards or paddles or signs does require some preparation, and conversation moves faster than a person might be able to keep up with. However, the effort is worth it; and once the signs or paddles are created, they can be used in subsequent classes. Most students find the stage business rather comical.

G. You Thought You Were Listening, Didn't You?

Approximate class time: 8–10 minutes, pausing for laughter and groans

Here's a quick listening activity that is fun and effective as an activity to get students to listen carefully to what's being said. It demands attentive listening and a measure of common sense. The concentration that this activity requires is good practice for any problem-solving situation that requires sensitivity and a clear understanding of what is being said.

1. Is there a July 1st in England? Yes or no?
2. How many birthdays does the average man have?
3. Some months have 31 days. How many have 28?
4. How many outs are there in an inning?
5. Is it legal for a man in Alberta to marry his widow's sister?
6. A doctor gives you three pills and tells you to take one every half an hour. How long will the pills last?
7. A farmer has 17 sheep. All but 9 of them die. How many sheep are left?
8. How many animals of each sex did Moses bring with him on the ark?
9. A butcher in the market is 5' 10" tall. What does he weigh?
10. How many 2-cent stamps are there in a dozen?
11. What was the prime minister's name in 2005?
12. If "Polk" is pronounced "poke" and "folk" is pronounced "foke," how do you pronounce the white of an egg?

Answers

1. Yes. It comes right before the 2nd.
2. One. You can only be born once.
3. Twelve. All of them have at least 28 days.
4. Six. Don't forget there are a top and a bottom to every inning.
5. No. He must be dead if it is his widow.
6. One hour. You take the first pill at 1:00, the second at 1:30, and the third at 2:00.
7. Nine. Like I said, all but nine die.
8. None. I didn't know that Moses had an ark.
9. Meat. That is self-explanatory.
10. Twelve. How many eggs are in a dozen? Twelve. It's a dozen.
11. Stephen Harper. As far as I know, he hasn't changed his name.
12. Albumen

Objective of this activity: Students will learn to concentrate on what's being said.

Evaluation: None. But note the number who do get the right answers.

What you can expect from this activity: This is a good “ice-breaker” yet with a serious purpose: listening often demands a high level of concentration to comprehend a message accurately.

6. Two Evaluations

Below are two evaluations that can be adapted to more complex assignments.

Basic Listening Comprehension

Conditions: Time, Task, Selection, and Instructions: 20 minutes

Read aloud to the class a previously unread, 150–200 word newspaper or magazine article from *The Financial Post*, *Financial Times*, *The Economist*, or *Business Week*, or a selection from your business communication text on a topic discussed in the course. Read clearly at a normal rate. Ask each student to paraphrase in writing the main idea presented in the article; note at least two details, such as who, what, when, where, why, or how; and note three key terms from the selection. (*Option:* Instead of reading aloud, you may choose to play an audiotape or a videotape on an issue discussed in the course.)

Option: Have the students respond in memo form as though they were summarizing a meeting discussion for an absent member, who could be their boss.

Competent criteria for task completion include the following:

- Summarizing the main idea of the selection
- Noting two supporting details
- Noting three key terms from the selection

AND/OR

- Asking two questions that address the main topic of the article

Listening to Non-Native English Speakers

Certainly one of the most severe obstacles to effective listening arises when one communicator utilizes a variety of English that is different from the other. Many speakers of English possess more than one variety of the language and know how to employ the appropriate variety in a given circumstance. Others, however, possess only their native variety of English. And many speakers of English in Canada, a nation of immigrants, speak English as a second language. English has emerged as the almost universal language of business and commerce. In most multinational organizations, from Ford and GM to the smallest firm with overseas branches, English is the language of choice. Instructors should emphasize to students that the English of world business is not necessarily “North American” English. Learning to listen to the many varieties of English is a valuable skill, both to an individual employee as well as to the larger organization.

Linguists know that a non-native speaker might learn vocabulary and grammatical features of a second language almost perfectly. In fact, non-native speakers of English often have a more profound and insightful grasp of grammatical issues than native speakers. This is simply the result of the fact that native speakers never really “learn” their language but rather they grow into it, much as a child acquires the ability to walk. Second language learners most often learn something of the “theory” of the language they are learning. Vocabulary and grammar can be learned, but an accent influenced by a speaker’s native language is almost impossible to eradicate. Many non-native speakers of English speak an articulate, insightful, and complex variety of English; but their speech still has remnants of their native language because their mouths and tongues have never quite mastered the oral gymnastics necessary to speak “perfect” Canadian or British English.

Objective: To enhance listening skills through exposing students to a wide variety of different “Englishes” in a thoughtful, reflective, linguistically aware context.

Preparation: The instructor will need adequate understanding of the vowels and consonants and inflection pattern of English. Phonetic background is helpful but the pronunciation key from any good dictionary is sufficient to complete the assignment. *Collins Gage Canadian Paperback Dictionary: New Edition* has an excellent pronunciation key. For instructors and students who take an interest in this language issue, we would suggest “The Human Languages Page” at <http://www.june29.com/HLP/>. This page is a gateway to many wonderful language resources.

As instructors and students will see as they examine the table of English speech sounds, English and all other languages are composed of vowel and consonant sounds, with a small selection of hybrid sounds, like the “l,” “r,” “y,” and “w” sounds. There are approximately 14 vowel sounds and 26 consonant sounds. Different languages have different numbers of phonetic building blocks, and often languages have sounds that do not appear in English. Most classrooms will have a few non-native speakers and the instructor should call on these valuable resource speakers to help make the learning more real. We would suggest that the class practise English vowels and consonants to become more aware of their sound and shape.

Conditions: Task, Time, Selection, Instructions: 30 minutes. The instructor will present a video, audiotape, or person speaking a non-native variety of English. The classroom must be sufficiently quiet and the quality of the performance must be sufficiently excellent so that students can “listen” to the nuances of speech. The instructor should structure the performance so that there is “real” content as well as a wide variety of nonstandard sounds. After the performance, the instructor will ask students to note in written form observations about what they have heard. By keeping a phonetic chart handy, with vowels and consonants plainly visible, most students will be able to identify differences in pronunciation. With input from all listeners, the class will be able to create a short guide describing similarities and differences between the variety of English they have heard and their own variety or varieties.

The instructor should also ask the listeners to record the content of the presentation. Most likely, there will be mishearings motivated by nonstandard pronunciation. Again, students with experience in cross-cultural communication will have much to add to the discussion.

Chapter 2: Professionalism: Team, Meeting, Listening, Nonverbal, and Etiquette Skills

If time and interest allow, students can interview colleagues or friends who speak English as a non-native language and create a guide to understanding such speakers. In addition to the phonetic issues, interviewers can include grammatical issues, questioning forms, pluralization methods, gender considerations, speaking distances, and other aspects of that language community. Language is a good way to enter into the world of the non-native speaker, a world increasingly more important to American business.

What you can expect from this activity: Cross-cultural communication discussions always provoke insight and interest. Businesspeople love to relate their favourite miscommunication episodes. And the stories we hear are instructive as well as extremely humorous. Employees who work with telephones will be able to relate the particular problems of “voice only” communication.

Issues of correctness and quality will no doubt arise during the discussion. Obviously language issues are problematic; countries have fought for linguistic independence, citizens have been harassed and discriminated against because of language differences, and the issues of “Black English” and “Second language instruction” animate the education community. We would emphasize that these are political issues more than linguistic ones.

7. Bibliography and Resources

- Brody, Marjorie. (2004, May). “Learn to listen,” *Incentive*, 178(5), 57.
- Brownell, Judi. (1993). Communicating with credibility: The gender gap. *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 34(2), 51–61.
- Brownell, Judi. (1996). *Listening: Attitudes, principles, and skills*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon. An excellent book for theory with activities and application exercises.
- Burley-Allen, Madelyn. (1995). *Listening: The forgotten skill*. New York: John Wiley. Burley-Allen developed this book from her experiences in teaching corporate seminars in listening and management. The book, which is labelled as a “self-teaching guide,” contains many practical exercises and checklists.
- Fracaro, Ken. (2001). “Two ears and one mouth,” *SuperVision*, 62(2), 3.
- Pollock, Ted. (1997). A personal file of stimulating ideas, little-known facts and daily problem solvers. *SuperVision*, 58(1), 21–23.
- Purdy, M. and Borishoff, D. (1996). *Listening in everyday life: A personal and professional approach*. New York: University Press of America.
- Richman, Arleen. (2002, Apr/May). “Listen up!” *The National Public Accountant*, 24.
- Tannen, Deborah. (1995). *Talking from 9 to 5*. New York: Avon Books.

Another valuable resource is the International Listening Association. The International Listening Association promotes the study, development, and teaching of listening, as well as the practice of effective listening skills and techniques. Web Site: <http://www.listen.org/>

The ILA Bibliography, 2nd edition, with more than 1250 entries, is available in a printed version. Information is available at the ILA Web site.