

Appendix 9: Listening skills observation worksheet

Online supplement for "The Making of an Expert Engineer" by James Trevelyan

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This exercise is designed to help you notice listening skills and help one of your peers know more about their listening. Watch the discussion, focusing on only one person at a time, and note particular instances of listening skills (good and bad). When you pause to note an instance, you will have to miss the next minute or so of the discussion, but it is important to make good notes so you can recall the instance later. Make notes for this person so they can learn from what you notice about their listening skills.

For each of the skills or roadblocks below, when you notice a person using them, note the time and a few words spoken so you and they can recall and discuss these instances later.

Listening Failure Indicators

Indicators of a listening failure: these are not by any means proof that a listening failure has occurred, though.

- a) Listener starts speaking while the speaker is still talking.
- b) Listener is looking at someone else, not looking at the speaker. (Note, however, that in many cultures, it is considered impolite to look directly at a person of higher social status, or even a young person of the opposite sex.)
- c) Listener's response demonstrates that they have not correctly understood the speaker.
- d) Listener responds by talking about a completely different topic from what the speaker was talking about.
- e) Listener fidgets, shuffles feet, or gathers papers while speaker is talking.
- f) Listener does not check that they have heard what the speaker said correctly, such as "OK, so I will see you on Thursday at 5, right?"
- g) Listener is leaning back in his or her chair, with arms folded (closed posture).

Finally, read the book "People Skills" by Robert Bolton (Bolton, 1986). At \$25 it is a very worthwhile investment. Even if you have read it before and studied these notes, read it again....every time you will learn something new. Even good listeners are still learning after a lifetime of practice.

Factors that indicate or affect the extent of listening	Time that action was used	Quotation, few words spoken
Posture: leaning back (disengaged), neutral, or forwards (engaged, interested)?		
Appropriate body movements?		
Eye contact: looking at speaker?		
Effect of environment: distractions? glare? noise?		
Door openers? (casual conversation leading to reduce tension before important points)		
Minimal encouragement? (prompts when speaker is silent, but not too quickly)		
Infrequent open questions? (e.g. "That's cool....tell me more about")		
Attentive silence? (allow some silence to give the speaker time and space)		
Spoilers and Road Blocks: factors that interfere with listening		Note which ones you have observed....
Background noise		(evaluate)
Starting reply before speaker has finished.		
Criticizing (e.g. "I'm not sure that was a good thing to say.")		
Name calling (e.g. "Josh, that's typical for you!")		
Diagnosing: giving your analysis of what the speaker has just said.		
Praising evaluatively (e.g. Well done, you certainly gave her what she had coming)		
Thinking about something else while the speaker is talking. (e.g. the next comment is not relevant to what speaker has just said)		
Ordering (e.g. "You should tell him about.....")		
Threatening (e.g. "If you don't then will happen)		
Moralizing (e.g. "It's not right to say that.")		
Logical argument (e.g. "If it's true that you said, it follows that you must have.....")		
Advising: (e.g. "I think you should have told them to")		
Diverting attention		
Excessive or inappropriate questioning		
Reassuring		