**Listening for Information**

**Interpersonal Communications**

**Mz. Hope**

*I don’t mind that you are talking, so long as you don’t mind that I am not listening- Morning Smile, Cape Breton Post*

Different types of listening are suited for different purposes.The goal of **informational listening** is to make sure you are accurately receiving the same thoughts the other person is trying to convey. Here are several guidelines:

1. **Talk less (see Ted Talk on Shutting Up!)**

“We have been given two ears and but a single mouth, in order that we may hear more and talk less”- if your true goal is to understand the speaker, avoid the tendency to hog the stage. However, don’t be completely silent! Feedback is important:

*I talk too much but the manner of your listening calls the words out of me. You say almost nothing. Yet there would be only silence if you were not here.- Aiden Nowlan, “Apology”*

1. **Get rid of distractions:** both external and internal.
2. **Don’t judge prematurely:** We are all guilty of evaluating others before hearing them out. This tendency is greatest when the speaker’s ideas conflict with our own. Listen first. Make sure you understand. Then evaluate (more on this later with paraphrasing).
3. **Look for key ideas:**

It’s easy to lose patience with a long winded speaker who never seem to get to the point, but by using your ability to think faster than the speaker can speak, try to extract the central idea.

1. **Ask sincere questions: aimed at understanding others, whereas counterfeit questions** are really disguised attempts to send a message, not receive one:

* Questions that trap the speaker:  *You didn’t like that movie, did you?* You are left with only two options, whereas *What did you think of the movie?* let’s you respond authentically. Look out for tags such as *Don’t you? Do you? Didn’t you?* These leading questions coercing a desired answer, not a sincere one.
* Questions that make statements: *Are you finally off the phone? Are you going to stand up to him and give him what he deserves? You lent money to TONY?!*
* Questions that carry hidden agendas: *Are you busy Friday night? Will you do me a favour? Can I ask you a question? Can I say something? If I tell you what happened, will you promise not to get mad?*
* Questions that seek “correct” answers: *Honey, do you think I look ugly?*
* Questions based on unchecked assumptions: *Why aren’t you listening to me?* *What’s the matter?*

Questions cont.

Why do people not ask questions? We don’t want to seem ignorant or we assume we already know what the speaker is talking about.

1. **Paraphrase (or active listening):** Sometimes, questions can actually lead to greater confusion. The biggest problem is when your inquiries do not tell whether you have accurately received information that has already been sent. Consider another type of feedback- one that would tell you whether you understood what had already been said before you ask more questions. This involves **restating in your own words the message you thought the speaker had just sent, without adding anything new.** You reflect the IDEAS you think the speaker has expressed:

(to the boss): “ So you need me both this Saturday and next Saturday, right?”

(to a professor): “When you said ‘Don’t worry about the low grade on the quiz,’ did you mean it won’t count against my grade?”

Or, you reflect the FEELINGS of the speaker:

“You said you understand, but you look confused. Are you?”

“You seem to be in a hurry. I get the idea that you don’t want to talk now. Is that right?”

“You said, ‘forget it,’ but it sounds like you are mad. Are you?”

**Assignment: Counterfeit questions, page 293 and 310.**

**Skill builder: Paraphrasing practice, page 295.**

**Types of Paraphrasing**

Whether you reflect a speaker’s thoughts or feelings, or whether you focus on a specific theme or comment, the key to success is **to restate the other person’s comments in your own words**.

What’s the difference between parroting and paraphrasing?

Speaker: “I’d like to go but I can’t afford it.”

Parrot: “You’d like to go but you can’t afford it.”

Paraphrasing: “So if we could find a way to pay for you, you’d be willing to come, is that it?”

**Read: Teaching Doctors to Listen page 297.**

**Three approaches to paraphrasing, depending on the situation:**

1. **Change the speaker’s wording.**

Speaker: “Social assistance is just another way for Canadians to freeload off the government!”

Paraphrase: “Let me see it I got this right. You’re upset because you think social assistance recipients should have to work to receive money.”

1. **Offer an example of what you think the speaker is talking about.**

When the speaker makes an abstract statement, you may suggest a specific example or two to see if your understanding is accurate.

Speaker: “Lee is such a jerk. I can’t believe the way he acted last night.”

Paraphrase: “You think those jokes were pretty offensive, huh?”

1. **Reflect the underlying theme of the speaker’s remarks.**

When you summarize the theme that seems to have run through another person’s conversation, a complete or partial perception check is appropriate.

Paraphrase: “You keep reminding me to be careful. Sounds like you’re worried that something might happen to me. Am I right?”

Your paraphrasing gives the other person the chance to make a correction. Besides increasing understanding, paraphrasing is an excellent way to keep the tone positive: if you are sincere about it! Otherwise, you might engage in hostile behavior that might lead to a destructive battle. It might feel awkward at first, so start gradually and you will learn the benefits of this method.