



learn. practice. reflect.

Listening



© 2023 livingroomconversations.org + civity.org

Learn

- Listening includes the ability to **accurately receive and interpret** messages in the communication process.
- Intention to listen effectively leads to **attention** on how you engage.
- Listening is **key to all effective communication**. The ability to listen effectively and demonstrate understanding **builds trust** and a path towards collaborating with others.
- Listening skills **can lead to better relationships**, greater **productivity** with fewer mistakes, increased **confidence and self-esteem**, **creativity**, **happiness**, and world **peace**.

How do YOU listen?



Watch this humorous depiction of good and not-so-good listening. See if anything rings true to you.



<https://vimeo.com/768603279>

How well do you listen?

This exercise can help you identify your daily behaviors in listening and where you might like to improve. Rank how often you do the following when another person is speaking.

1- Rarely 2- Once in a while 3- Occasionally 4- More than I like 5- Frequently

- Daydreaming or thinking about other things
- Struggle to be interested in the subject or speaker
- Allow non-emergency distractions like cell phones or multi-tasking
- Make assumptions/judgments
- Discount the speaker's experience, age, or language
- Shutting down a difficult topic
- Redirect the conversation back to you
- Judging the speaker's style, mannerisms, clothing
- Listen for facts to one-up, debate, interrupt, manipulate or give advice
- Cut off the speaker because you believe you know what they will say

- Total**

Take a moment to look at your results. Add up all of your numbers; a higher score (32+) indicates more distractions and actions that inhibit quality listening. Which areas would you like to change?

Now honestly consider how those you those in your life would rate your listening skills.

On a scale of 0-10, (10 – highest):

- Your best friend
- Your partner or spouse
- Your children
- Your teacher or boss
- Your peers or coworkers
- Yourself

Total

What do you think would make a difference to improve those numbers?

Being a Better Listener



Reflection: What observations do you have about your results? Did anything surprise you?



Watch the video clip and identify 2-3 things you can try to implement.

Civility Storytelling

civility:

a culture of deliberately engaging in relationships of respect and empathy with others who are different

Now that we've covered basic listening skills, let's move on to the importance of listening across differences. In the following video, you will watch a brief explanation of what civility is and the work of Civility the organization. Then you will see brief videos of people sharing what others may miss about them and what community means to them. Then you'll have the chance to reflect on the intervention and share something people may miss about them. The following page in this packet will have space for you to reflect.

Click here for the eight-minute digital intervention – [Civility Storytelling: Expanding the Pool of People Who Matter](#)

Stanford University's Strengthening Democracy Challenge found that this relational approach to connecting people across differences can strengthen democracy and reduce polarization by building social trust and fostering connection.

https://sshs.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_88PAor84Vs03X5Y?Condition=Civility_Storytelling

Reflect - Civity Storytelling

Do labels - political party affiliation or other aspects of identity - capture all of who people are? Who you are? Who the people in the videos are?

What's your story? What about you may people often miss? What about other people's stories may you be missing?



Listening + Silence

Silence can sometimes feel uncomfortable. Don't be afraid to sit in silence for short periods of time, as needed. Practice silence and holding your tongue instead of speaking out impulsively or commenting after every time someone talks. We can trust in and learn from silence.

Anyone can ask for silence to allow for a deeper truth to set in or an honoring of intense emotion or to "name" the elephant in the room if there is discomfort or disharmony in the process.



Watch authors Justin Zorn and Leigh Marz talk about the power of silence and think about your relationship or comfort with silence.

Silence can be beneficial:

- Before and after someone speaks
- After a provocative statement or question
- At transitions between question rounds
- When you need time to think or process

Do you think there is a cultural value for silence? Where do your ideas around silence come from?

Tips for bringing silence to your conversations:

- Focus on listening rather than interrupting or giving advice
- If appropriate, allow questions aimed at clarity and understanding, rather than trying to prove someone wrong or attack
- Is there anything else?
- How did you come to that conclusion?
- What is the connection between ___ and ___?
- Allow time for everyone to be heard while honoring each person's right not to speak

Living Room Conversations

Conversation Agreements

These six Conversation Agreements create an environment for deep listening and the opportunity to *practice* that skill along with others like empathy, curiosity, and authenticity. As you read through each agreement, try to identify the role listening plays in each one.

Be curious and listen to understand.

- Conversation is as much about listening as it is about talking. You might enjoy exploring how others' experiences have shaped their values and perspectives.

Show respect and suspend judgment.

- People tend to judge one another. Setting judgment aside opens you up to learning from others and makes them feel respected and appreciated. Try to truly listen, without interruption or crosstalk.

Note any common ground as well as any differences.

- Look for areas of agreement or shared values that may arise and take an interest in the differing beliefs and opinions of others.

Be authentic and welcome that from others.

- Share what's important to you. Speak from your experience. Be considerate of others who are doing the same.

Be purposeful and to the point.

- Do your best to keep your comments concise and relevant to the question you are answering. Be conscious of sharing airtime with other participants.

Own and guide the conversation.

- Take responsibility for the quality of your participation and the conversation as a whole. Be proactive in getting yourself and others back on track if needed. Use an agreed upon signal like the "time out" sign if you feel the agreements are not being honored.



Let's Practice!

Consider the following scenarios. How could you lean on one of the Conversation Agreements to help you be a better listener?

A friend from high school is posting really inflammatory things on social media. You feel like you want to engage, and at the same time just ignore it.

You're having a conversation with a friend when a topic comes up that you're really passionate about. You find yourself launching into long defense of your position while your friend grows silent

You're at a family dinner and the subject of masks and vaccines comes up. You know you are the outlier in the group so you usually stay quiet until they finish their rant instead of sharing the reasons for your position. However, they are making derogatory remarks toward people with your opinion and it's getting harder for you to stay quiet



Preparing to Listen Courageously

Take a moment to answer some questions from the [Listening Courageously](#) conversation guide. Try to think of *personal experiences* you have had as you write your answers.



What does “courageous listening” mean for you? Describe any times you have listened, or been listened to in this way. What happened?



What fears, if any, do you have about how you will feel or what you will say or do when listening to people whose beliefs or experiences differ from your own?



How do you feel when there are silence and gaps in conversations? What are the potential benefits of giving a conversation breathing room?

Try It out!

You've learned what listening is, assessed your own listening skills, and thought through scenarios. Now you get to take what you've learned and put it into practice with other humans. Choose one or all of the below activities.

Post a Question Online



Grab a question below, and post it along with your intention to listen to people's stories. Consider offering your own answer to get the conversation started!

Walk & Talk



Walking and talking creates connection! Grab a question, walking partner, and one of the listening strategies you want to practice.

Gather a Group



Have a dinner party or group conversation! LRC has "[question buffets](#)" you can use in addition to the questions below. Consider reading the conversation agreements as a group.

Questions to Grab + Go

- What assumptions do people make about you or your life? What expressions of curiosity would you welcome?
- Who in your life do you trust and why? What institutions do you trust and why?
- What have you done to stay connected with people you care about who have different political perspectives?
- How important was voting in your family? How do you navigate news and social media during elections?
- Is it easy or hard for you to connect with others who were raised differently, or live and think differently than you? Why or why not?
- What role have guns played in your life?

