

ACTIVE LISTENING

Active listening is the practice of listening to a speaker while providing feedback indicating that the listener both hears and understands what the speaker is saying.

COMPONENTS OF ACTIVE LISTENING

There are three primary aspects of active listening:

1. *Comprehending* – In the comprehension stage of listening, the listener actively analyzes and listens to what the speaker is saying without distraction or thoughts about other topics.
2. *Retaining* – Retaining requires the listener to remember what the speaker has said so that the speaker's full message can be conveyed. Some people may opt to take notes or use memory tricks when practicing active listening.
3. *Responding* – Responding is the act of providing both verbal and nonverbal feedback to the speaker that indicates the listener is both hearing and understanding what the speaker has said.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIVE LISTENING

In active listening, the speaker must feel heard. Listeners can utilize several techniques to accomplish this end. Nonverbal cues used by an active listener might include:

- Head nods
- Smiles
- Appropriate eye contact
- Leaning forward toward the listener

Verbal cues used by an active listener may include statements such as:

- "Mm-hmm"
- "I see"
- "How strange"
- "Tell me more"
- Any other statements that encourage the speaker to continue

Therapists engaged in active listening frequently reflect back a portion of the speaker's words or the emotions conveyed by the speaker. For example, a therapist might say, "If I'm understanding correctly, you're feeling both angry and sad at the same time about your mother's death. Is that a fair characterization?"

References:

1. Rothwell, J. D. (2010). *In the company of others: An introduction to communication*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.