



# Listening effectively during lectures

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## Introduction

Differences in how people listen can directly affect what they are able to hear, remember and understand. While you are at university, a proportion of your learning will directly come from listening to others (for example, lecturers). In order to maximise your ability to learn from listening it is important to develop an understanding of how to effectively listen in an academic setting.

This resource illustrates differences in how people listen and provide strategies as to how you can improve your listening skills.

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## Different ways of listening

How you listen influences how much information you absorb:

### Passive Listening

When you hear someone talking but you don't actually hear any of what they are saying. Passive listening is therefore somewhat 'lazy'. If asked questions, a passive listener would struggle to repeat details of what they have just heard. A passive listener only hears when a speaker's tone of voice changes or if something personally relevant is said.

### Active Listening

Actually involves hearing what the other person is saying. An effective active listener is able to listen to repeat what they heard in own words.

Students who use active listening techniques learn more from both their lectures and their peers, because they engage more actively with spoken content. Likewise, they develop a better understanding of the information that has been discussed during a lecture.

## How to become an active listener

The following strategies will enable you to become a more active listener:

### **Pay full attention to what is being said**

Using active listening in a lecture will save you revision time later. Focus on what the lecturer is saying; avoid distractions as these hinder your listening. Distractions might include a window or a friend who talks during lectures. To minimise the impact of distractions you might want to strategically select a spot in a lecture room where you can concentrate and not be disturbed.

### **Do not let your own opinions cloud what you hear**

Having a point of view on the subject will keep you interested in the lecture (or seminar). This said, make sure that when you disagree with what's being said, as this may affect your concentration. This may result in switching from active listening to what can be described as 'selective hearing'. This is not helpful as you may miss important information, which may help you develop your own argument.

### **Check your own understanding**

It is not uncommon for two people to hear the same words from the same person but come up with very different meanings. Check if you have fully understood what a lecturer by explaining to friends what you thought they meant and see if your understandings are the same.

It is crucial to always seek clarification if you are ever unclear about what something means or when something appears ambiguous (has more than one meaning).

### **Consider how what you hear links to what you already know**

You rarely ever learn things in isolation. Usually there will be links between your units, lectures and tutorials. Think about how what your lecturer is teaching you links with what you already know and fits in to a 'bigger picture'. Active listeners may also be able to link what they are hearing to their own personal experiences involving, for example, friends, work or family.

### **Pose questions (when appropriate)**

Part of active listening involves participation. Your learning can be greatly enhanced through asking questions whenever you are given the opportunity during lectures:

- Questions should always be asked in a polite and respectful manner.
- Questions should only be asked at appropriate times so don't interrupt a tutor whilst they are talking. If necessary write down a question and ask it later.

### **Ways you might you ask questions in a lecture:**

- You said earlier about X. Could you please explain that again?
- In my reading I came across X and Y. You have just told me about Z which is different. How do these concepts all fit together?

### **If you feel nervous about asking questions remember:**

If you are unsure about something it is always best to seek clarification. If everyone in the class didn't ask questions because of nerves nobody would ever ask a question.

- I. Every time you ask a question (no matter how nerve-racking) you will get better at doing it.
- II. Asking questions is an important skill to develop in relation to employability.

### **Further information**

The Learning Resources Study Hub provides a range of opportunities (such as workshops and drop-ins) for you to enhance your academic skills. For more information visit:

**[lrweb.beds.ac.uk/studyhub](http://lrweb.beds.ac.uk/studyhub)**

