Listening

Listening is not the same thing as hearing. Doing it effectively requires concentration and energy. Like time management, developing good listening skills promotes success in school as well as in a career. It is really a life skill. Developing good listening skills is the essential first step to developing good note taking skills.

Most people think they are good listeners, but studies show that most of us use less than 25% of our listening potential. Active listening is a focused, consuming activity that requires energy, concentration, and discipline.

Good listeners are highly valued. They make good students, friends, roommates, parents, teachers, managers, employees, and co-workers. Think for a minute of a person that you would consider a good listener. It may not be easy because there aren't a lot of really good listeners out there. After you have that person in mind, ask yourself this question: "Did you like that person?" It is pretty hard not to like a good listener. Active listening shows respect and caring and is one of the best gifts one person can give another person.

You can develop active listening skills. Chances are if you are not happy with your note taking skills, it may be related to your listening skills.

Steps to take to develop good listening skills:

Apply Yourself. You must want to be a better listener, and you must accept the fact that listening is an active rather than a passive activity. Applying yourself includes being prepared. Read your textbook and go over your lecture notes from the previous class before going to class.

Be Open. Don't form opinions about your instructor that cause you to tune out. You may not like his or her mannerisms or presentation style, but don't let these factors interfere with how you listen. Postpone judgment and be open to new information even though you might not agree with it.

Be Alert and in the Present. Paying attention is vital for active listening. It's true that everyone's mind wanders during a long lecture, but being mentally preoccupied is a major barrier to effective listening. Active listening requires that you be attentive and live totally in the moment. If you tell yourself that you can read the material later or copy your notes over, you won't be attentive. Sit near the front where you can make eye contact with the instructor. This helps keep your attention focused.

Predict Questions. Since listening is an active process, try getting involved by asking yourself questions as your instructor lectures.

Observe and Pay Attention to Details. Watch for obvious verbal and nonverbal clues as to what information is important. Sometimes this is done with key words -- sometimes by volume, pauses, and cadence. Watch for "organizational patterns" — signal words like *then*

and *next* may indicate a "time or chronological pattern;" "process patterns" like first, after this, then, next and finally; "Place or spatial pattern" may include from left to right or high to low, north to south; Listen for "cause-and-effect patterns," and "compare or contrast patterns" with signal words such as similarly, likewise, conversely, and on the other hand.

Listen, Don't Talk, and Show Interest. The fundamental rule of listening is, be quiet while the speaker is talking. This is important, obviously, when we are talking about learning from a lecture, but it is also important in interpersonal relations. To be a good listener, you don't interrupt; nor do you think about formulating your answer while the other person is still talking. You're listening actively, and when the other person finishes, then you think for a second and respond. Act interested whether you are in a large lecture hall or in a one-on-one conversation with a friend.

Developing good listening skills can go a long way in helping you develop other good study skills.