

Activity: Concentrating to Improve Listening

Materials Needed: 2 textbooks, magazines, or newspapers

Directions to
Students:

First try: The instructor will select two students to go to the front of the room and stand facing the class. Each will be given a different section of printed material to read to the class from a newspaper, textbook, or similar source. At a signal from the instructor, they will begin reading at the same volume until the instructor directs them to stop. They will read for about two minutes. Before the reading begins, choose the person to whom you will listen. When the readings have ended, summarize the message communicated by the person to whom you chose to listen.

Note to Instructor: Try to select readers with similar sounding voices and prompt them to read at competing volumes. The concurrent readings should last 2 to 3 minutes. Front-page stories from a local newspaper will provide appropriate text. This activity can also be done with three readers if the classroom is relatively small. A way to conserve time is to dispense with the written summaries and to do away with the discussion of them. Instead, after each reading you can ask for a show of hands of how many people believe they can summarize what was said. In order to validate the show of hands, you might even ask one or two to recite what they thought they heard.

Directions to
Students:

Second try: The two readers will be given new sections to read. Once again, you are to choose in advance to listen to one of them and not the other. This time you should make a more concerted effort to block out the other person (who may have distracted you the first time around) and to focus solely on your speaker. Try these aids to listening. Sit more forward in your chair. Maintain constant eye contact with your speaker, even though he or she is not looking at you. Imagine that you and the speaker are completely cut off from any movement or sound in the outside world. Do whatever else you believe will improve your ability to listen. When the second readings have ended, summarize what your speaker has said.

Note to Instructor: You want students to do better this time in order to demonstrate the value of concentration. Therefore, be sure to emphasize to them the techniques for concentration.

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Follow-up: Chances are the second summary was more accurate and was easier for people to write than the first? Why? What concentration technique worked best for you? If your second summary was not easier to write, why not? The dramatic point of how simple it is to improve your listening through concentration should be highlighted in this discussion.

Source: Comex – The Communication Experience in Human Relation, Sussman and Deep, South-Western Publishing Company, 1984.