Listen Actively

Overview: This lesson will provide the student with a clear definition of each communication skill, the elements of that skill and how the skills are linked.

Educational Goal: The goal of this lesson is for each learner to comprehend the communication skill—Listen Actively.

Objectives:
Cognitive: — Define Listen Actively
— Identify appropriate strategies to use with each standard to increase communication
Affective: — Contribute to classroom discussion
— Receive the information and apply it in their daily lives

Skills Standard Connection: This lesson links to past lessons on the communication process and prepares learners for future lessons by giving them a good foundation in communication skills. This lesson has connections to the Tennessee KSA – Listen for Understanding and the EFF Standard – Listen Actively.

Teaching Strategy: This lesson will focus the learners’ attention on the communication skill—Listen Actively. Point out to learners that this skill happens simultaneously as people communicate with one another. The teacher will define the skill using the EFF Skill Standard, Strategy Chart, and the Talking Heads visual. Learners will be given a copy of “How to Improve Your Listening Skills” as the reading material for this lesson. Methods of instruction will include: lecture, question-and-answer, and group discussion.

Lesson Plan

Introduction

Attention: To be effective parents, workers, citizens, or students we must be effective communicators. We are going to begin today to use our listening skills to help us understand the message that other people are
sending to us. We learned when we studied the Communication Loop that communication is the process of sharing ideas, feelings, and thoughts with other people and having those ideas, feelings, and thoughts understood. Today we will look more in depth at a communication skill and identify strategies to help us improve our ability to communicate effectively.

Motivation:
Question: What would happen to your family if you were unable to communicate with them?

You can see that being unable to communicate can cause many problems. Yet even with the ability to communicate sometimes misunderstandings occur, feelings are hurt, and things go wrong all because people did not communicate effectively with us or we were unable to effectively communicate with them. Today we will learn that when we communicate there is a constant flow of information and that by using communication strategies we can obtain the information we need, solve problems, and be confident in our ability to communicate with others.

Activity: Do the following activity with your learners. You will need to have distracters such as a penny, nickel, and dime. Using the distracters, hold each one up as you say a name in the following story.

Say: Jerry’s mom and dad had three kids. The first child’s name was Abraham (hold up penny). The next child’s name was George (hold up the nickel). What was the third child’s name (hold up dime)? Wait for learner responses. Usually you will have to repeat the story. They will ask you to tell them the story again. Most of the time learners will say a president’s name because they are focusing on the coins instead of what is being said. Every time you tell the story, emphasize Jerry’s name. Some of them will usually get the story after the third time. The answer is Jerry.

After this activity say to the class: Listening is more difficult than you may have thought. You were focusing on the coins, which were a distracter and not useful to the meaning of the information. The distracter changed your focus. This can happen at any point in the communication process. Remember the communication process? Point to the process in the room and specifically to the barriers. Barriers are those things that interrupt the message.

Overview: This lesson will build on the basic concepts of communication that you have already learned and help you become aware of strategies that you can use to improve your communication skills. You will use the booklet, “How to Improve Your Listening Skills” and the EFF Skill Standard to develop a new understanding of listening and observing. So let’s begin by looking at an essential communication skill—Listen Actively.
Body of Lesson

Main Point 1. Why Do People Listen?
People listen in order to:
• Increase knowledge or to learn
• To gain understanding
• For general reasons
  —To respond appropriately to what we hear
  —To gain information about work or school—it gives us details about what to do, how to do it, when and where to do it.
    Example: When is the first break? How do you know?
• To gather data to make decisions
• To be more effective in our interpersonal relationships: When children return home from school and it has been a “bad” day or when your spouse had a “hard day” at work.

Turn to page 2 in your “How to Improve Your Listening Skills” book. Let’s read pages 2 and 3 to find the definition of listening and why it is important. Turn to page 5 in the book and take the listening inventory. When you finish, score your paper. You can use this inventory later to determine what skills you need to work on.

Main Point 2. Importance of Listening
Listening well is critical to our ability to become an effective communicator. Listening is one of the most used communication skills and one of the most neglected communication skills. How many of you have ever had a course in how to listen? Listening is not as easy as it sounds. When you are listening actively, you are focusing on what the other person is saying in order to understand what they mean. This requires energy and effort.

Main Point 3. Effective Listening Means Hearing, Comprehending, and Remembering
It takes all three elements to be an effective communicator. Let’s look at each element.

A. Hearing—hearing is not the same as listening. Have you ever heard your spouse or child tell you something but you misunderstood their message? To really hear the message takes energy. It means paying attention physically, asking open-ended questions, maintaining eye contact, and focusing on what the speaker is saying.
B. Comprehending is understanding the message. It means being able to interpret what the speaker is saying. It also means being aware when you are not understanding the message and adjusting your listening strategies so you can comprehend the message. Some ways you might do this are to ask the person questions, paraphrase what the person said, try to understand the other person's point of view, or watch the person's body language. Turn to page 4 and let's ready pages 4, 6 and 7.

C. Remembering—once you have heard the message you will need to remember it.

Main Point 4: Tips for Effective Listening and Ways to Improve Your Listening Skills

Before Listening
• Take responsibility for comprehension. Your teacher can make sure that you hear but only you can be sure that you understand.
• Get ready to listen; focus your attention on the speaker.
  — Physically
    1. Try to tune out physical distractions such as noise, hunger, being hot or cold.
    2. Try to remove things that may distract you as you listen in class.
      Example: pagers, cell phones, materials on desk, etc.
  — Mentally
    1. Resist mental distractions; actively focus on the speaker.
    2. Review what you already know about the subject.
    3. Review your notes.
    4. Try to find an area of interest within the subject.

During Listening
• Listen for the main ideas.
• Listen to understand rather than to argue or find mistakes.
  — Hear the person out before you respond. You are listening to gain information, not necessarily to agree with it.
  — Don’t be critical. Don’t tune out on the information because you don’t see the value in it.
• Keep an open mind.
  — Control your emotions. If your emotions take control then you have created a barrier. Try to maintain balance.
  — Judge content, not delivery.
• Be mentally agile. Most people speak at about 200 words a minute, but the mind processes words at around 400-500 words per minute. During the mind’s spare time it can easily wander. Be alert.
• Feedback/paraphrase to check understanding—ask questions and put the information into your own words.
• Take notes—you can always reread but you can never re-listen.

Ways to Improve

• Work at listening—active listening is understanding. It takes energy to concentrate on what the speaker is saying and not what you want to say next. You will need to be aware of the verbals and the nonverbals. When you are communicating with others you must become a people watcher. Look at their nonverbal communication. What are their facial expressions? What is their stance? Are their arms folded? Do they ask you questions? Are they playing with their hair, jewelry, or clothing?
• Practice effective listening—put yourself in situations that require effective listening. While you are in class take notes and ask questions when you do not understand what is being said. (Give students a copy of the EFF Standard—Listen Actively. Read the Standard with the students.)

After reading the Standard ask the following question:
Question: What does the Standard Listening Actively say we must do in order to communicate effectively?

• Stop talking—“I never learned anything while I was talking” (unknown sage). You can’t hear if you are talking. Don’t interrupt; let the speaker finish. A good listener will maintain eye contact with the speaker, not be doing other things, and not talking when the speaker is talking.

Main Point 5: Monitor the Effectiveness of Your Communication

In order to be an effective communicator you must monitor the effectiveness of your communication at all times and adjust your strategies to increase understanding, overcome barriers, and respond in the right way. Give students the Skill Standards & Strategies Chart (in Appendix I). Ask the students to look at each skill standard and the strategies to use with that skill. Ask students to give an example of a time when they would use that strategy.

Teaching Tip

Have learners give specific examples of what “attend to oral information and visual information” means.

Check to see if they can identify listening and observing strategies. If they cannot identify strategies, tell them that they will get a handout that will help them identify these strategies.
Conclusion

Summary: This lesson builds on the basic concept of the communication skill that you have been using in daily life. You learned that poor communication skills can cause conflict and that effective communication can eliminate many problems at home, school, or on the job. You also learned that listening and observing work together.

Re-Motivation: Becoming an effective communicator will help you to achieve many of the goals you have set. You can improve your communication skills by assessing yourself on a daily basis. You can also ask teachers and friends or family members to give you feedback on how you are doing. Practicing your skills daily will make them become habits. At the beginning of this lesson you took a listening inventory—use that to help you decide which skills you will work on.

Close: Activity: Tell the students the following story. Ask them to listen closely and answer your question.

You are driving a bus. At the first stop five people get on the bus. At the next stop three people get off the bus and two people get on.

(Usually at this point students will begin to try to solve a math equation. Let them do it.) At the next stop ten people get on the bus and six people got off. What was the bus driver’s shoe size?

Usually students will say, “How am I supposed to know?” or give you a math problem. At this point ask the students to listen closely while you retell the story. Sometimes one or two students will get the answer after hearing the story three times. This story seems to be more difficult than the Jerry story. (The answer is: You are the bus driver. What is your shoe size?)

Homework Assignment: Listen Actively. Assign students to listen to the radio or television, take notes on what they saw and heard, and report back to the class.
**Objective**

The objective of this activity is for the student to (1) review his or her performance on the TABE Test, comprehend what is known and what needs further improvement, (2) identify specific test taking strategies, (3) respond to the value of diagnostic assessments, and (4) set a short-term goal using the Plan-Do-Study-Act model. This final activity connects to the student taking responsibility for their learning using available resources, independent study, and teacher assistance.

The students have completed the TABE Test complete battery and are ready to see how they have done. The review process is a simple one. It depends upon the program having enough versions of the TABE test.

**Procedure**

TABE provides various versions of a test so a diagnostic review could be accomplished without test compromise. The time between tests and various versions should negate any possible test item recall. Plus the easiest and best way for a student to master any items is to simply learn how to do it.

1. **Provide each student with the results of his or her tests.** Be sure to re-emphasize that this pre-test was conducted with no preparation or support through in-class instructions. It is just an indicator of where the student is starting his or her educational journey. So, it’s okay the results are only a baseline to improve upon with hard work. The teacher should use appropriate words of encouragement, a positive attitude about improvement, and a realistic view of the effort it will take to be successful. The important part of having this knowledge is that the student sets some goals and develops a plan to achieve them. Reassure the student that at the end of the review there will be an opportunity to set goals and develop a plan to achieve them using the Shewhart cycle and the EFF planning standard.
2. Each student reviews test items he or she missed or had a question about. The teacher should allow the student to discover his or her own mistakes by having the student try the problem again. Observe closely how they do the problem to understand where the student is making the mistake. Once the pressure of the “clock” is off the student, they can figure out the problem. If that is the case ask the following questions: “What happened, why, and how can you fix it next time?” These questions will help the student to reflect, evaluate, and learn from the process. Have the student write down the strategy or principle they learned on his or her test-taking worksheet. Again, they should focus on the technique and strategy used not the specific content of a question. Continue this throughout the complete battery. You will be surprised at the outcome of the techniques and strategies the students come up with. Reinforce the learning through positive motivation and encouragement. Also use the student’s learning insights to show if they hadn’t made certain test-taking mistakes they would have had a better score.

3. However, if the student continues to make the same mistake, the teacher has to decide if it is a quick fix or detailed in-class instruction is needed. Also, there are some numerical operations or concepts the student has not been taught yet, this will require classroom instruction.

4. The bottom line is—the student needs to understand what can be attributed to faulty test taking strategies or gaps in his or her knowledge. They need to know that they can do it with effort, motivation, and discipline.

In Learning Skills we have found faulty test taking strategies as a primary culprit for student’s missing numerous test items at appropriate testing levels. Numerous teachers have confirmed this conclusion. When the student is not under the proverbial “clock” they relax and perform better. Once they understand that they know the information, they can then employ certain strategies to become better at taking a test. End the review session on a positive note, referring to the knowledge and insights gained through taking the TABE tests.

**Summary**

To conclude this activity, the teacher should ask the following general questions of the student.

1. What have you learned about yourself and testing?
2. Why is that knowledge important?
3. How can you use it to guide your learning?

The teacher should guide the student’s discussion towards reaching the activity objectives.

Another option for test item review is taking generic subject (grade appropriate) standardized tests. Several publishers print grade-level subject tests that can be obtained at local school supply stores. The fact is practice test items can be an effective learning tool for pro-
viding understanding, practice, and building student confidence. Throughout the process the teacher should control any guided review.

**Homework**

Given what the student has learned about their test-taking skills and areas for improvement, these insights should be turned into a short-term goal-setting activity. Homework Activity with *Independent Study in workbooks* helps to support this.

An alternative TABE Review is found following Lesson 19.