

IMPROVING CLIENT COMMUNICATION

LEARN TO BECOME A BETTER LISTENER

This is a skill that you can use in all areas of your life. It's not easy, but it's worth working on.

ACTIVE LISTENING DEFINED

There are many definitions of this, but here's a good one:

"[T]he act of mindfully hearing and attempting to comprehend the meaning of words spoken by another in a conversation or speech. Active listening is an important business communication skill, and it can involve making sounds that indicate attentiveness, as well as the listener giving feedback in the form of a paraphrased rendition of what has been said by the other party for their confirmation."¹

We realize that Wikipedia is not considered a reliable source, but its definition of active listening is very consistent with what I was taught in my mediation seminar class during law school:

"Active listening is a communication technique used in counselling, training and conflict resolution, which requires the listener to feedback what they hear to the speaker, by way of restating or paraphrasing what they have heard in their own words, to confirm what they have heard and moreover, to confirm the understanding of both parties."²

Note the emphasis in both definitions of restating or paraphrasing what the listener hears.

GOOD DISCUSSION OF LISTENING

If you have a spare 7 minutes, listen to Julian Treasure's Ted Talk entitled [5 Ways To Listen Better](https://www.ted.com/talks/julian_treasure_5_ways_to_listen_better) which you can find here: https://www.ted.com/talks/julian_treasure_5_ways_to_listen_better.

ACTIVE LISTENING TECHNIQUES

RASA: The aforementioned Julian Treasure advocates RASA which means:

- Receive: meaning paying attention to the person
- Appreciate: meaning making little noises like hmm, ok
- Summarize: using the word "so"
- Ask: questions afterwards

Other Approaches: Most active listening approaches recommend similar steps. You must pay attention to the speaker and exhibit cues/body language that you are actually doing so. You should provide some kind of feedback such as paraphrasing to confirm that you are understanding what the speaker is saying. No matter what your emotional or intellectual reaction to what you're hearing, refrain from judging or interrupting the speaker. Finally, ask questions and respond appropriately after the speaker stops talking.

¹ [Customer service; active listening](https://integriaims.com/en/active-listening/), by Dimas Pardo, January 31, 2018, available at <https://integriaims.com/en/active-listening/>.

² See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Active_listening.