ACTIVE LISTENING

Purpose
- To identify attributes for effective listening
- To understand how distractions can be managed by choice and intention
- To practice listening in different groupings

Materials
Student document:
- Active Listening: Rules for Engagement
- Listening Tip: You are in Charge of Distractions

Time
Forty minutes

Know the Terms
These terms will be discussed during the course of this lesson:
- listening
- attention
- distraction

Background
Knowing the language of learning enables students to more actively engage in the process. Listening is a fundamental necessity, yet we rarely discuss nuances of the process. Discussing and practicing successful listening strategies has optimum benefits when repeated, referenced, and reviewed. The Active Listening: Rules for Engagement student document can be revisited each week for students to reassess their ability and progress. This models how learning complex information and improving skills, rather than being a one-time experience, develops over time with intention and work. Authentic learning frequently requires review, repetition, and practice. Ideally, students will then realize they can continue to apply the information in the Student Guide to future learning situations.

Opening
- On the board write, “If you can’t make a mistake, you can’t make anything.” Marva Collins, educator. Ask students to stand and find partners with the same letter beginning their first or last names. Partner remaining students. Discuss the meaning of the quote for one minute.
- Students find a new partner, summarize what was discussed with the first partner, then discuss what this quote has to do with their learning experiences.
- Ask for comments. Add that mistakes may happen as we strive to improve skills.

Process
- Ask a student volunteer to read from a book while you sit and listening. Model poor listening skills. Ask students to describe with detail what they saw (movement, looking out window, reading a book, talking to a friend, interrupting to ask an unrelated question). List on board.
- Have the student read while you model good active listening skills. Ask students to describe with detail what they saw (eyes on reader, staying still, asking appropriate questions). List on board.
- Have students refer to the Active Listening: Rules for Engagement document. Read the first
paragraph aloud. Have students underline key words or phrases. Check comprehension by
asking, What does this mean? When is listening easy? (listening to friends, listening to music)
When is listening a challenge? (in class, when it's for a long time, if I don't like the topic)

Active Listening Skills
• Read each category in the Active Listening chart aloud. With each, have students:
  1. underline key words
  2. ask for clarification of any word or phrase
  3. summarize back in their own words (model this with one student for each category)
  4. assess their listening ability as of today by placing today’s date to in the appropriate box
  5. draw a star by the skill they select to improve first.
• Name each category; ask students to raise hands with the skill they intend to improve first.

Listening Tip: You are in Charge of Distractions
• Write “distraction” on the board and ask for a definition. Again, ask questions to ensure
  comprehension. Review the listening tip on distractions. Ask students to list on their paper as
  many distractions as possible in one minute. Have students 1) cross out distractions easily
  dismissed, and 2) place a check by the distractions that often interfere with listening.
• Read aloud the paragraph that explains how we think faster than we listen. Ask students to
  consider how knowing this fact helps us be better listeners (we can choose to pay attention).
  Listening becomes their choice; two boxes are provided for their consideration.
• Read aloud the next paragraph about distractions. Acknowledge that challenging distractions can
  be put on a “shelf.” Guide students in building a virtual shelf. Have them pick up a virtual
  miniature piece of wood and place it by their heads. Next, pick up a virtual teensy hammer and
  four sturdy virtual nails. Have the students say aloud, “hammer hammer hammer” as they
  hammer the virtual shelf securely in their minds with each nail. Let students know they now
  have a place to store distractions.
  Note: If this seems an unlikely activity to do with older youth, give it a try! You may be amazed
  to find the willingness to participate if presented with enough serious intent (humor is permitted)
  that they know you want them to follow along. Students may find this new way to approach
  distractions a concept that proves helpful.
• Have students turn to a partner and state what new information they learned about distractions.

Closing
• Have students identify a lower rated skill on their chart. Write two specific ways they will work
  toward improvement under: To improve my active listening I will . . .
• Ask students to complete the second writing prompt: Since I think faster than a person can
  speak, to better manage my distractions I can . . .

Follow-up
• During the next week, review each student’s document to see notes areas of improvement.
• Refer to this document once per week at first then every 2-3 weeks to reassess and date.
• Use the words in class. In the lesson on Retention, suggest students practice active listening. The
day after, have students respond on the Active Listening Skills chart to see change.
Active Listening: Rules for Engagement

If you think listening is passive and doesn't take much involvement, think again. Listening is a challenging activity. It takes desire, intention, thinking, and practice. Rate your listening ability, then practice, and improve.

For each Active Listening Skill, ask yourself: Am I fair at this, good, very good, or awesome? Then place today's date in the rating you select. On another day, reassess your active listening and rate and date your progress.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active Listening Skills</th>
<th>Looks Like</th>
<th>Sounds Like</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Awesome</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eye Contact</strong></td>
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<td>Watch the speaker. Even when taking notes, you can still keep your eyes looking at the person most of the time.</td>
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<td><strong>Content</strong></td>
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<td>Subject subject subject. Keep your mind on the topic. If you start to wander, get yourself back to subject subject subject.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Attention</strong></td>
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<td>Notice distractions and choose to pay attention. Think: eye contact and content. Give yourself the ability to pay attention.</td>
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<td><strong>Ask Mental Questions</strong></td>
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<td>Keep your mind alert by asking yourself, What is the main point? What does this mean to me? What do I think will happen?</td>
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<td><strong>Ask Questions Out Loud</strong></td>
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<td>Did you miss something? Is something confusing? Then be sure to identify what you need and ask.</td>
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Listening Tip: You are in Charge of Distractions

A distraction is

Come up with a list of as many different distractions as you can imagine:

☐ ☐
☐ ☐
☐ ☐
☐ ☐

Look at your list of distractions. Cross out the distractions you can easily dismiss. Place a check mark by the ones that get in your way.

Ever think of other things when you are supposed to listen? Why do you get distracted? Simple reason! You think faster than the person can speak! You can put distractions aside when you want to listen well. This requires a deliberate act. Distractions can be persistent.

Your choice, so choose one:

☐ Be distracted
☐ Pay attention and listen

Some distractions are easily dismissed (someone opening and closing a notebook). Some distractions are harder to put aside (a disagreement with a friend). Create a virtual shelf to hold important distractions (your teacher will tell you how.) Your distractions will be there later when you have time and appropriate attention.

Closing Thoughts
To improve my active listening I will:

☐ ☐

Since I think faster than a person can speak, to better manage my distractions I can:

1.

2.