

## **Improving Your Listening Skills**

1. Factors that influence your ability to listen effectively
  - ✓ Your attitude
    - Your interest level in the topic
    - Your attitude toward the subject
    - Your attitude toward the speaker
  - ✓ The topic
    - Your familiarity with words, terminology or topic
    - Difficulty level of the course
    - Quantity of information presented
  - ✓ The speaker's qualities
    - Speaker's tone of voice
    - Speaker's rate of speech
    - Speaker's speech patterns and mannerisms
    - Speaker's organization of the presentation
    - Speaker's teaching/lecturing style
    - Speaker's clarity in explaining information, providing examples and/or providing evidence to support a point
  - ✓ External distracters
    - Noise and movement from people nearby
    - Room temperature or lighting
    - Interruptions by others
    - Outside sounds
  - ✓ Personal factors
    - Length of time required to remain seated
    - Sitting posture during the lecture
    - Seating location in relation to the speaker
    - Personal physical state at the time
    - Personal emotional state at the time
    - Personal background experiences
    - Cultural background
2. Kinds of listening
  - ✓ Active listening: concentrating intently on the information being presented
    - Goal is to understand and learn new information
    - Become familiar with the topic and increase interest
    - Pay attention to the speaker's verbal and nonverbal cues
  - ✓ Critical listening: higher level of listening that involves critical thinking
    - Goal is to understand, interpret, examine and analyze a speaker's message
    - Involves personal opinions, differing viewpoints, and emotional responses

- ✓ Empathic listening: sincere interest and attempt to empathize or relate to another person's feelings, emotions and thoughts
  - Goal is to understand and relate to another person's emotions
  - Speaker wants to be heard, not necessarily looking for advice or consolation
- ✓ Appreciative listening: enjoying the message or information in a positive way
  - Goal is to enjoy, appreciate and acknowledge a speaker and his/her message
  - Captivating, humorous storytelling, emotional responses occur

### 3. Key elements of Active Listening

- ✓ Pay attention
  - Make eye contact, push aside distracting thoughts, avoid environmental distractions
- ✓ Show you are listening
  - Nod your head, smile, open and inviting posture
- ✓ Provide feedback
  - Paraphrase, clarify, summarize
- ✓ Defer judgment
  - Do not interrupt, allow speaker to finish even if you disagree
- ✓ Respond appropriately
  - Be open, honest and respectful

### 4. Ways to Strengthen Listening Skills

- ✓ Create interest or curiosity about the topic
- ✓ Strive to develop the mental discipline to stay focused on the speaker
- ✓ Visualize the topic and content
- ✓ Monitor your emotional response
- ✓ Ask clarifying questions
- ✓ Paraphrase the speaker
- ✓ Pay attention to verbal and nonverbal cues
- ✓ Discuss or explain the information to someone else