



# ACTIVE LISTENING

LEVEL 2 PROJECT



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# INTRODUCTION



Adults retain only 25–50 percent of what they hear. Listening requires concentration and focus to process meaning from words and sentences. When truly listening, you recognize body language, verbal cues, and nonverbal cues that confirm or alter what the speaker is saying.

In this project, you will learn the difference between hearing and listening, study how to comprehend and connect with a speaker, and explore why listening helps build strong, lasting connections. You will uncover the relationship between listening and strong leadership.

## YOUR ASSIGNMENT



**For all assignment details and requirements, review the Project Checklist on page 9.**



**Purpose:** The purpose of this project is to demonstrate your ability to listen to what others say.

**Overview:** At a club meeting, fulfill the role of Topicsmaster. As Topicsmaster, comment on each speaker's Table Topics® speech to demonstrate your active listening skills. For example, you might say, "Thank you. That was a compelling opinion on the benefits of gardening. I understand you feel strongly that everyone needs to spend some time doing something they love."

Throughout this project you will see icons in the margins next to the text. These icons indicate additional resources available online.



**Video:** Sign in to Base Camp to watch a video that supports this project.



**Interactive Activity:** Sign in to Base Camp to complete an interactive activity.



**Resource:** Sign in to Base Camp to view this resource online.

# ASSESS YOUR SKILLS

Evaluate your current skill level by rating each statement.



Select the appropriate number based on your skills today:

**5**  
EXEMPLARY

**4**  
EXCEL

**3**  
ACCOMPLISHED

**2**  
EMERGING

**1**  
DEVELOPING

Pre-Project					Statement	Post-Project				
5	4	3	2	1	I understand the difference between hearing and listening.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I am confident in my listening skills.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I am an active listener.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I ask questions to clarify what I am hearing.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I defer judgment while listening.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I recognize how this project applies to my life outside of Toastmasters.	5	4	3	2	1

# COMPETENCIES



**The following is a list of competencies that you will learn and practice in this project.**

- Apply listening skills to increase comprehension and connection.
- Acknowledge the need for active listening.
- Recognize the difference between hearing and listening.
- Improve basic listening skills.

## HEARING VERSUS LISTENING

Hearing is the physical act of processing sounds in your environment. It is passive. Listening occurs when you take what you hear and extract meaning. Active listening is the process of understanding and repeating what you have heard.

Focus on these steps to become a better listener:

- Respect the speaker's point of view.
- Relax and remain engaged, giving the speaker your full attention.
- Reserve judgment.
- Notice the speaker's comfort level and excitement.
- Avoid interrupting.
- Ask clarifying questions to ensure understanding.
- Find instances where you empathize with the speaker's experiences.
- Give nonverbal cues to demonstrate your interest.
- Summarize and repeat to demonstrate you understood what the speaker has said.



## NONVERBAL CUES

Listening requires you to be aware of more than the words a person speaks. Recognizing the different cues a person gives while communicating is an essential aspect of good listening and can lead to increased understanding. Cues are split into two categories: verbal and nonverbal.

Verbal cues are found in the volume of the speaker's voice or the tone she uses. They can also be heard in the questions a speaker asks, or whether a speaker is seeking approval. Verbal cues may indicate the speaker's state of mind. For example, if she is uncomfortable, her voice might be too loud or too quiet. An uncomfortable speaker may ask questions to seek affirmation or encouragement.

Nonverbal cues are expressed through body language, such as eye contact, crossed arms or legs, and fidgeting. Fidgeting can indicate the speaker is uncomfortable. Speakers who are comfortable talking with you come across as relaxed during your interaction.

# THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING IN LEADERSHIP

The best leaders tend to be great listeners. Sensing the moods, social dynamics, and attitudes in a room allow a brilliant leader to adjust the tone of her message to fit the audience. Leaders who develop an acute external awareness also tend to be more successful.

Individual performance in an organization is directly connected to the ability to listen effectively. Good listening skills can lead to innovation, because considering different perspectives can increase the chance of discovering a more creative answer to any problem.





## REVIEW AND APPLY



Before you complete the assignment, take a moment to read through the questions you see here. If you are not able to answer them comfortably, review the project.

- How does improving your listening skills help you build better connections?
- What is the value of active listening?
- Describe the difference between hearing and listening.
- What steps can you take to improve your basic listening skills?

## COMPLETE YOUR ASSIGNMENT

Now that you have read through the project, plan and prepare your speech or report.

**Review:** Return to page 3 to review your assignment.



**Organize:** Use the Project Checklist on page 9 to review the steps and add your own. This will help you organize and prepare your assignment.

**Schedule:** Work with the vice president education to schedule your Table Topics® session.



**Prepare:** Prepare for your evaluation. Review the evaluation resources on pages 10–12 and share all resources with your evaluator before your speech. You may choose to share your evaluation resources online.

# PROJECT CHECKLIST

## Active Listening

**Purpose:** The purpose of this project is to demonstrate your ability to listen to what others say.

**Overview:** At a club meeting, fulfill the role of Topicsmaster. As Topicsmaster, comment on each speaker's Table Topics® speech to demonstrate your active listening skills. For example, you might say, "Thank you. That was a compelling opinion on the benefits of gardening. I understand you feel strongly that everyone needs to spend some time doing something they love."

**This project includes:**

- Serving as Topicsmaster at a club meeting

Below are tasks you will need to complete for this project. Please remember, your project is unique to you. You may alter the following list to incorporate any other tasks necessary for your project.

Request to be the Topicsmaster at a club meeting.

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Explain to the vice president education that you will be completing your "Active Listening" project and will need extra time and an evaluator to evaluate your active listening skills.

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Complete the role of Topicsmaster as described in the "Active Listening" project.

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After you have completed all components of the assignment, return to page 4 to rate your skills in the post-project section.

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# EVALUATION FORM

## Active Listening

Member Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_ Speech Length: 5 – 7 minutes

**Speech Title** \_\_\_\_\_

### Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project is for the member to demonstrate his or her ability to listen to what others say.

### Notes for the Evaluator

The member completing this project is practicing active listening. At your club meeting today, he or she is leading Table Topics®.

**Listen for:** A well-run Table Topics® session. As Topicsmaster, the member should make short, affirming statements after each speaker completes an impromptu speech, indicating he or she heard and understood each speaker. For example, the member may say, "Thank you, Toastmaster Smith, for your comments on visiting the beach. It sounds like you really appreciate how much your dog loves to play in the water."

The goal is for the member to clearly show that he or she listened and can use some of the active listening skills discussed in the project. The member completing the project is the **ONLY** person who needs to show active listening. The member should not try to teach or have others demonstrate active listening skills. The member should follow all established protocols for a Table Topics® session.

### General Comments

You excelled at:

You may want to work on:

To challenge yourself:

For the evaluator: In addition to your verbal evaluation, please complete this form.

5 EXEMPLARY	4 EXCELS	3 ACCOMPLISHED	2 EMERGING	1 DEVELOPING
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<p><b>Clarity:</b> Spoken language is clear and is easily understood</p> <p>5            4            3            2            1</p>	Comment:
<p><b>Vocal Variety:</b> Uses tone, speed, and volume as tools</p> <p>5            4            3            2            1</p>	Comment:
<p><b>Eye Contact:</b> Effectively uses eye contact to engage audience</p> <p>5            4            3            2            1</p>	Comment:
<p><b>Comfort Level:</b> Appears comfortable in the role of Topicsmaster</p> <p>5            4            3            2            1</p>	Comment:
<p><b>Active Listening:</b> Responds to specific content after each Table Topics® speech</p> <p>5            4            3            2            1</p>	Comment:
<p><b>Engagement:</b> Shows interest when others are speaking</p> <p>5            4            3            2            1</p>	Comment:

# EVALUATION CRITERIA

## Active Listening

This criteria lists the specific goals and expectations for the speech. Please review each level to help you complete the evaluation.

### Clarity

- 5 – Is an exemplary public speaker who is always understood
- 4 – Excels at communicating using the spoken word
- 3 – Spoken language is clear and is easily understood
- 2 – Spoken language is somewhat unclear or challenging to understand
- 1 – Spoken language is unclear or not easily understood

### Vocal Variety

- 5 – Uses the tools of tone, speed, and volume to perfection
- 4 – Excels at using tone, speed, and volume as tools
- 3 – Uses tone, speed, and volume as tools
- 2 – Use of tone, speed, and volume requires further practice
- 1 – Ineffective use of tone, speed, and volume

### Eye Contact

- 5 – Uses eye contact to convey emotion and elicit response
- 4 – Uses eye contact to gauge audience reaction and response
- 3 – Effectively uses eye contact to engage audience
- 2 – Eye contact with audience needs improvement
- 1 – Makes little or no eye contact with audience

### Comfort Level

- 5 – Appears completely self-assured in the role of Topicsmaster
- 4 – Appears fully at ease in the role of Topicsmaster
- 3 – Appears comfortable in the role of Topicsmaster
- 2 – Appears uncomfortable in the role of Topicsmaster
- 1 – Appears highly uncomfortable in the role of Topicsmaster

### Active Listening

- 5 – Responds with interest and fully supportive comments after each Table Topics® speech
- 4 – Responds with clear interest after each Table Topics® speech
- 3 – Responds to specific content after each Table Topics® speech
- 2 – Responds to specific content after some Table Topics® speeches
- 1 – Responds to content after few or no Table Topics® speeches

### Engagement

- 5 – Highly interested and engaged with every speaker
- 4 – Shows interest and is fully engaged when all others are speaking
- 3 – Shows interest when others are speaking
- 2 – Shows some interest in speakers
- 1 – Shows little or no interest in speakers



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