

Active Listening

One real conversation where your only job is to make the other person feel completely heard.



28 min practice + 5 min journal

Bonus · extra credit

Handwritten journal, dated & timed

GGIA difficulty: Intensive

Bonus practice — **extra credit**, done in addition to (not instead of) your three chosen practices and 12 sessions. One session is enough. Longer than a standard session: plan 20–30 minutes plus a 5-minute journal. Submit the journal entry in the same Weekly Drop.

1 Why you should try it

Often we'll listen to a conversation partner without really hearing them. In the process, we miss opportunities to connect with that person — and even risk making them feel neglected, disrespected, and resentful.

This exercise helps you express active interest in what the other person has to say and make them feel heard — a way to foster empathy and connection. The technique is especially well-suited for difficult conversations and for expressing support. Research suggests that using it can help others feel more understood and improve relationship satisfaction.

2 The session — Prof. Magee's 28-minute protocol

Follow these timings, not the website's. Set a timer. One session = the 28 minutes below, then 5 minutes of journaling immediately after. One session for the bonus (you may do more). Also the best possible warm-up for a difficult conversation you've been avoiding.

3'

20'

5'

3 Set it up

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Find a quiet place where you can talk with a partner (friend, partner, family member, roommate) without interruption. Phones away. Invite them to share what's on their mind — something that matters to them, ideally a frustration or a decision. Tell them your job for the next 20 minutes is just to listen well.

20

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Listen — the seven moves

1. Paraphrase. When they finish a thought, reflect it: "What I hear you saying is..." "It sounds like..." **2. Ask questions** to clarify rather than assume: "When you say ____, do you mean ____?" **3. Express empathy.** Validate feelings instead of questioning them: "I can sense you're frustrated — I can understand how that would be." **4. Engaged body language:** eye contact, nodding, facing them, open posture; no disapproving faces. **5. Avoid judgment** — no rebuttals, no mentally preparing one. **6. Avoid giving advice** until both of you feel understood. **7. Take turns:** only after all that, ask if it's okay to share your perspective, using "I" statements.

5

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Debrief together

Ask them, plainly: did you feel heard? What did I do that helped or got in the way? Listen to *that* the same way.

3 Then journal — 5 minutes, by hand

- Top of the entry: **date and time**. Entries without both lose credit.
- Write for **5 minutes without stopping** (about 300 words). Messy is fine; stopping is not.
- Before / during / after: how did you feel at each point? Be specific — body, mood, thoughts.
- What surprised you? What felt fake, awkward, or easier than expected?
- **Prompt:** Which of the seven moves was hardest for you — and which one did you catch yourself abandoning?
- **Prompt:** What did you learn about the other person that you wouldn't have if you'd talked?

4 Evidence that it works

Weger, H., Jr., Castle Bell, G., Minei, E. M., & Robinson, M. C. (2014)

Participants had brief conversations (about their biggest disappointment with their university) with someone trained to engage in active listening, someone who gave them advice, or someone who gave simple acknowledgments of their point of view. Participants who received active listening reported feeling more understood at the end of the conversation.

5 Why it works

Active listening helps listeners better understand others' perspectives and helps speakers feel more understood and less threatened. This technique can prevent miscommunication and spare hurt feelings on both sides. By improving communication and preventing arguments from escalating, active listening can make relationships more enduring and satisfying. Practicing it with someone close to you can also help you listen better with everyone else — classmates, coworkers, roommates.

6 Know the research — for your presentation (APA 7)

In your presentation you will explain, **from memory and without notes**, the evidence behind each practice — who studied it, when, and what they found — plus something *not* written on the GGIA site or on this handout. Read these papers (SJNY library or Google Scholar), then follow their citations forward to find **your own article** — one more peer-reviewed study on this topic that is not the source study here (due Sun Dec 6). Take photos along the way; they are your slides.

Weger, H., Jr., Castle Bell, G., Minei, E. M., & Robinson, M. C. (2014). The relative effectiveness of active listening in initial interactions. *International Journal of Listening*, 28(1), 13–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10904018.2013.813234>

Adapted for PSY 251 from Greater Good in Action, Greater Good Science Center, UC Berkeley — original at https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/active_listening. Practice sources: Instructions adapted from Markman, H., Stanley, S., & Blumberg, S. L. (1994). *Fighting for your marriage*. Jossey-Bass.. Timings, session structure, and journal rules are Prof. Magee's and override the website's.