

ACTIVE LISTENING FOR MENTORS AND MENTEES*

When engaging in conversation with each other as mentor and mentee, it is important to actively listen. This technique is meant to help encourage mutual understanding and respect within your relationship. Apply the five tips below to nurture fruitful and effective discussions between you both.

1. Pay Attention

Give the speaker your undivided attention and acknowledge that you are really hearing what they have to say. Acknowledgment can be as simple as an “uh huh” or nodding. Look directly at the speaker, don’t mentally prepare responses, and avoid distractions. Taking notes is acceptable, as long as it doesn’t completely transfer your attention.

2. Demonstrate That You’re Listening

Use your own body language to show that you are engaged in the conversation. Nod, respond to points with facial expressions, display an open body posture, and encourage the speaker to continue with small verbal interjections. Take into account any cultural differences and norms in body language as well.

3. Reflect Back and Summarize

As a listener, your role is to fully understand what is being said. Paraphrasing using starters like “What I’m hearing is…” and “It sounds like what you are saying is…” is a great way to reflect back and summarize the speaker’s comments. You can also ask questions like “What do you mean when you say…” and “Is this what you mean?” to request clarification.

4. Don’t Interrupt

Interrupting can disrupt the speaker’s flow and limit your full understanding of the message being shared. Allow the speaker to finish each point before you begin asking questions and summarizing their statements.

5. Respond Respectfully

As the listener, you are gaining information and perspective. After the speaker finishes, be candid, open, and genuine in your response. Assert your opinions and feedback, but don’t be overly harsh. Treat your conversation partner the way you would want to be treated.

→ [MENTOR.UIOWA.EDU](https://mentor.uiowa.edu)

*Adapted from [MindTools](#)