

MAKING YOUR INSTRUCTION LISTENER FRIENDLY

Students spend more than half of the school day listening to information and instructions. Students may have difficulty listening for many reasons. For instance, English may not be their first language. They may have receptive language difficulties, memory difficulties, learning disabilities and/or Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD), all of which can affect their ability to process information and to listen effectively. They may be distracted by personal emotional concerns or experience intermittent hearing loss due to colds and allergies. Listening difficulties put students at a distinct disadvantage and can create frustration for both the student and teacher.

Listening is more than just hearing. It requires the student to focus on key information and filter out the unimportant information, as well as retain, retrieve and apply the information.

A Model for Teaching

Difficulties with language processing, attention, memory and/or executive processing interfere with learning and listening. Most of the strategies that help students listen effectively are commonly used by teachers. What makes the difference for students with learning disabilities and/or AD/HD is the intentional way that strategies are presented and applied. Students with learning disabilities and/or AD/HD do not automatically connect the dots or generalize strategies they might have learned. These students will need to be directly taught to use strategies and supports. Teachers need to be intentional, explicit and intensive in their teaching and use of the strategies. Instructions, tools and strategies need to be:

- Presented explicitly
- Demonstrated clearly
- Modeled effectively
- Practiced with feedback
- Reinforced consistently
- Reviewed regularly in order for the student to be successful.

Most importantly, the strategies need to be repeated and applied across subject areas. This type of structured instruction will benefit many students, not only students with disabilities.

What Listening Difficulties Might Look Like

Students may:

- Appear to be not paying attention
- Need directions repeated
- Fail to follow instructions
- Miss important details
- Have difficulty retrieving information
- Have trouble focusing on the task at hand
- Work shows gaps in information
- Engage in limited note taking.

Core Model Steps

The core model for application follows these steps:

- Set goals
- Use a variety of instruction techniques:
 - Verbal explanations
 - Visual cues and prompts
 - Demonstrations
 - Modeling – both teacher and students
- Provide opportunities to practice
 - Guided feedback on first attempts
 - Verbal coaching over time
 - Positive feedback for effort and success
- Evaluate
 - Strengths and needs
 - Success and challenges in applying strategies

Strategies

Following are a few of the key strategies that can help students listen more effectively. Although they will be universally helpful for all students, they are critical targeted supports for students with special needs, particularly learning disabilities and/or AD/HD.

REDUCE DISTRACTIONS

- Close the classroom door.
- Move the student near the front of the classroom.
- Use a class-wide sound field system.

SET THE STAGE FOR ACTIVE LISTENING

- State a clear purpose for the lesson verbally. Provide visual support by writing it down, or by using images and models.
- Provide students with a graphic organizer or key visual (e.g. semantic map, KWL, compare and contrast chart), outline or listening guide at the beginning of the class and teach them how to use it. Students with learning challenges need explicit instruction on how to use these supports, prompts for when to use them and reinforcement when they do use them.
- Introduce students to different note taking techniques:
 - Split-page note taking
 - The Cornell method
 - Semantic webbing
- Use cue words to signal important information (e.g., “In summary..., Note the following..., Pay attention to..., Record this important fact..., This is important...). Students will need to be taught what the cue words are and their meaning, so they know what to listen for.
- Use transitional phrases to cue and signal the organization of information (e.g., first, second, third...).
- Write important ideas, key concepts and vocabulary on the blackboard or interactive white board. Underline important words in instructions.

PRESENT NEW INFORMATION AND INSTRUCTION IN SMALL CHUNKS

Chunking information includes providing opportunities for review and making connections.

- Introduce new vocabulary at the beginning of the lesson. This is especially important for those with language difficulties.
- Repeat important ideas and concepts by rephrasing and using multiple examples.
- Repeat questions.
- Review key points along the way.
- Connect the new information to previous knowledge.
- Review and encourage recall of previously presented information.
- Check for understanding throughout the lesson.
- Give students time to process information by providing opportunities for them to discuss concepts with a partner or to try examples or methods for themselves.

PLAN OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT

- Have students chart information on white boards, chalkboards, etc.
- Make learning into a game that requires them to respond.
- Set the expectation that the student will need “to do something”.
- Have students share with a partner. For example, make up a story using key concepts they are learning to enhance memory.
- Teach students to engage in post-listening strategies. For example:
 - Review notes from a lesson as soon as possible after class.
 - Connect what was heard today with what is already in notes.
 - Question themselves if there’s anything they don’t understand so they can get immediate clarification.
 - Draw up a summary statement from the lesson.
 - Read the summary statement as a pre-listening tool at the beginning of the next class session.

For Further Learning

Center for Research on Learning . (n.d.). *The KU Center for Research on Learning | KUCRL*. Retrieved February 13, 2013, from <http://kucrl.org/sim>

Classroom Strategies. (n.d.). *All About Adolescent Literacy*. Retrieved February 13, 2013, from www.adlit.org/strategy_library/

Graphic Organizers. (n.d.). *Education Place®*. Retrieved February 13, 2013, from <http://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer>

Practice Guides: Organizing Instruction and Study to Improve Student Learning. (n.d.). *Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Home Page, a part of the U.S. Department of Education*. Retrieved February 13, 2013, from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncer/pubs/practiceguides/20072004.asp>

LearningLinks Resource Centre. (n.d.). *LearningLinks Resource Centre*. Retrieved February 12, 2013, from <http://www.learninglinkslibrary.ca>

Tools

In addition to the above suggestions for presenting information in a “listener friendly” way, students can benefit from the following specific strategies:

STUDENT TIPS FOR BETTER LISTENING

- Face the speaker. It’s rather rude to have your back to them!
- Look at the speaker. Some kids have reported that looking at the speaker’s mouth can be helpful.
- Ask yourself. *“Do I have any idea what he is talking about?”*
- Relate the information to something you already know. Ask yourself: *“What does this remind me of? What can I associate it with?”*
- Take notes! For easier note taking, try using shorthand or a key points log approach.
- Ask questions. Check that you understand and have all of the information.

NOTE TAKING STRATEGIES

See attached templates outlining three note taking strategies that you can use with your students.

- Split-Page Note Taking
- The Cornell Method
- Semantic Webbing

Students can choose the note taking style that works for them. Here are a few tips you can use to help them choose:

- If seeing things helps you learn, take notes in a Semantic Web. Add colour to help you remember how information groups together or draw pictures as key visuals to help you remember.
- If hearing things out loud helps you remember and understand the information, use the Split-Page method to take notes and then get one of your friends or family members to ask you the questions and to listen to you say the answers. You could also try the Cornell Method and get someone to say the key phrase or words and then you could say the corresponding points aloud.
- If working with the information in a physical way helps you learn, use the Split-Page or Cornell Method and instead of saying the answers or points, write the information out two or three times. Try role-playing when reviewing notes. Adding movement improves memory storage and retrieval.

Student Tip Sheet: Note Taking Strategies

Three types of note taking are described. Try them out and pick one that you feel will work for you. Remember, these are ideas to help you get started. You can change them to work better for you. Read through each example.

Split-Page Note Taking

- Draw a line down the centre of your page.
- Put a title and the date.
- List key ideas and points to the left of the line.
- Generate questions to study from to the right of the line.

Some students prefer this method because it works well for studying – just fold the page, ask yourself the questions and check your answers.

Title	
Date: _____	
key points	question to study from
key points	question to study from
key points	question to study from

EXAMPLE:

<u>Note Taking</u>	
<p><i>Sept. 18, 2012</i></p> <p><i>Skim/review previous notes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>refresh memory</i> • <i>increase chance of remembering</i> • <i>check for understanding</i> <p><i>Materials</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>notebook</i> • <i>paper</i> • <i>2 pens</i> • <i>ruler</i> <p><i>Active – ask questions</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>1. What is the first thing I should do when I get home?</i> <i>2. Why?</i> <i>3. What materials are required?</i> <i>4. How can I be an active listener?</i>

The Cornell Method

- Draw a line down the centre of your page.
- Put a title and the date.
- Record key phrases or words to the left of the line.
- Record corresponding points to the right of the line.

Some students prefer this method for studying – just fold the page, think about the points that go with each key phrase.

Park, William (1989). *How to study in college* (4th ed). Dallas: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Title	
Date: _____	
key phrase or words	points: _____ _____ _____
key phrase or words	points: _____ _____ _____

EXAMPLE:

<u>Note Taking</u>	
<i>Sept. 18, 2012</i>	
<i>skim/review previous notes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • refresh memory • increase chance of remembering • check for understanding
<i>materials</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • notebook • paper • 2 pens • ruler
<i>active listener</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask questions
<i>self-monitor</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Am I listening? • Do I understand?

Semantic Webbing

- Put the date.
- Record the topic or main idea in the centre.
- Supporting details branch off in major groupings.
- Add details to each grouping.

Some students prefer seeing how the information is organized. Webs provide a visual picture of the topics and details and show how the information is connected.

EXAMPLE:

