Effective Listening

Listening skills are important for all people but they are especially important for students. Since the bulk of the material that you receive is in lecture form, effective listening should be one of your sharpest skills. Effective listening improves your note-taking and study skills, as well as your interpersonal communication.

There are four elements that make up effective listening:

Concentration

When you listen to the instructor, concentrate on what he or she is saying. You should centre your attention on the content of the lecture. Distractions take away from your ability to listen effectively, so ignore them when there are more important things on which to concentrate. Remember that the objective of listening is to gain insight into the material that is presented.

Self-Discipline

This is the key element to developing good listening skills. Self-discipline is most needed when distractions compete for your attention. When you find your attention wandering, don't punish yourself. Use your daydreaming as an opportunity to centre your attention on what is being presented.

Observation

Watch the speaker's gestures and facial expressions, and listen for voice inflections. These actions are the punctuation marks of verbal communication. They can give hints as to the importance and structure of the material. Noticing these nonverbal messages will give you a more complete understanding of the material.

Interest

Don't think that you can fool your instructors. They can usually pick up on your attitude toward what they are saying just by what you say or do. Even if you are not able to generate interest in the course, remember that what you are learning now is important for your educational goals, and that should help you to remain attentive.