

CHAPTER 6

ACADEMIC DEBATE

Introduction

Objectives

Definitions

Introduction to Academic Debate

- Essentials of Academic Debate
- Principal Debate Formats

Listening and Feedback (reacting to grounded criticism)

- Focusing on Listening Skills
- Strategic Listening
- The Six Skills of Effective Listening
- General Guidelines for Note Taking
- Reacting to Grounded Criticism
- Giving Negative Feedback Guidelines

Activities

Further reading

ACADEMIC DEBATE

INTRODUCTION

The academic debate was determined as a middle point assessment in this course. It will offer you a “real life” experience of engaging in a constructive debate whilst being observed by your colleagues and you will be assessed based on the rigor of your argument, sufficient in-depth subject knowledge of the topic and your ability to engage in the debate. In the previous chapters, we covered the important topics that will help you to participate effectively in the academic debate. The first part of this chapter outlines the basics of the academic debate and its formats based on the best Western publications. The second part examines listening and feedback - the crucial skills for being good in debate.

These are such essential academic skills that they are often taken for granted and given little emphasis in works on debate. Also, the subject of note taking in debate (or “flowing” as it is sometimes called) is often given only a small amount of attention or relegated to an appendix. This treatment, however, fails to recognize the importance of the nonspeaking roles in the debate. After all, as a debater, it you will in all likelihood spend far more time listening and writing than you will spend speaking.

So, in the second part of the chapter we discuss different habits of bad listeners and ways to become a good listener. We identify the main difficulties on the way to improve your listening and note taking skills. Also, while listening, of high importance is to listen to people in both careful and active ways and to be confident that they have heard the information that has been given to them. So in the end of this chapter we address the question of giving and receiving feedback, and how to react correctly to grounded criticism.

OBJECTIVES

- to train in argumentation
- to empower personal expression
- to hone communication skills
- to become a truly effective communicator by becoming an effective listener
- to improve your note taking skills that might be helpful in debate, as well as on the job and informal situations
- to understand the role and value of feedback
- to appreciate the vital learning that can arise from feedback
- to develop an understanding of how you can deal with criticism in a productive way

DEFINITIONS

Debate is the process of inquiry and advocacy, a way of arriving at a reasoned judgment on a proposition. Debate provides reasoned arguments for and against a proposition. It requires at least two competitive sides engaging in a clash of support for and against that proposition. Because it requires that listeners and opposing advocates comparatively evaluate competing choices, debate demands critical thinking. (Freeley, A., Steinberg, D., 2008)

Debate can be classified into two broad categories: applied and academic.

Applied debate is conducted on propositions, questions, and topics in which the advocates have a special interest, and the debate is presented before a judge or an audience with the power to render a binding decision on the proposition or respond to the question or topic in a real way.

Academic debate is conducted on propositions in which the advocates have an academic interest, and the debate typically is presented before a teacher, judge or audience without direct power to render a decision on the proposition. The audience in an academic debate does form opinions about the subject matter of the debate, and that personal transformation may ultimately lead to meaningful action. However, the direct impact of the audience decision in an academic debate is personal, and the decision made by the judge is limited to identification of the winner of the debate. In fact, in academic debate the judge may be advised to disregard the merits of the proposition and to render her win/loss decision only on the merits of the support as presented in the debate itself. (Freeley, A., Steinberg, D., 2008)

The first lesson to learn about listening is that listening is not the same as hearing. *Hearing* is recognition of sounds, including words, around you. When you walk into a busy office you hear a lot of words from nearby conversations. You catch a phrase or word here and there. But you're not listening

It's not until you focus in on words in a particular conversation and mentally engage with them that you're listening. So, for a working definition, ***listening*** is the mental process of interpreting, evaluating, and contextualizing the things we hear (McIntosh, P., Luecke, R., Davis, J.H., 2008).

In addition to actually listening, effective communicators let the speaker know that they are carefully following what is said, through body language, paraphrasing, questions, and other means. In other words, effective communicators *give feedback*. So what is feedback? In Ramaprasad's (1983) definition ***feedback*** is an information about the gap between actual performance level and the reference or standard level, which is subsequently used to alter that gap. Based on this definition, feedback needs to be meaningful, understood and correctly acted upon.

INTRODUCTION TO ACADEMIC DEBATE

ESSENTIALS OF ACADEMIC DEBATE

One of the requirements of any academic debate: teams agree to disagree about a specific topic. You should remember that the debate is just a contest in which the teams could have been assigned the other side of the issue. It would be appropriate that the participants shake hands at the end in order to indicate that the debate was just a middle point assessment of your progress, not a demonstration of personal convictions.

In debates there are the affirmative team, which supports (affirms) the proposition and the negative team, which rejects (negates) the proposition. Both sides must have an equal number of participants. The affirmative team usually begins the debate because it may be arguing for a change. Because this is more difficult to do than defending present policy, the affirmative team gets the advantage of speaking first. Also, the affirmative must go first so that the negative knows what to speak against. Most debate formats also allow the affirmative to have the last speech in the debate since it has the responsibility of proposing a change. (Rybold, G., 2006)

Successful debate should take account of the following prerequisites:

- *The effective format should promote the orderly development of arguments.*

Position Construction. At the beginning, the position of each team should be outlined. Controversial terms should be clarified, principal statements should be expressed, and positions should be explained based on quoted evidence.

Refutation. Once your opponent's arguments are heard, you have a responsibility to provide a reaction. Refutation—the act of evaluating the reasoning, the support, or the implications of an adversary's argument should occur as early in the debate as possible.

Rebuttal. The act of defending the argument after it has been refuted is called “rebuttal.” Normally, this defense of the arguments against attacks happens in the closing phases. Often, in order to encourage final speeches to focus just on rebuttal (and to avoid the continuing articulation of more and more arguments), the team is forbidden to introduce new arguments in the closing speeches.

Questioning (cross-examination). This is the best way for you to clarify information, to expose flaws and to lay the groundwork for the argument than to ask a question directly of the other team. By either allowing a specific time for questioning (often referred to as “cross-examination”) or by allowing questions that interrupt an opponent's speech time (often referred to as “points of information” or simply “points”), you can add the excitement of direct interaction to your debate.

- *The effective format should include equal and alternating speaking time.* A core principle of debate is that each team should have an equal opportunity to make its case and this suggests that the speaking time should be strictly equal.
- *The effective format should provide the first opportunity to the team supporting the proposition.* Generally, the proposition being debated will place the greater burden of proof on the team supporting the proposition
- *The effective format should include variety.* In order to retain interest, the debate should include a mix of types of activities—speeches, questions, and sometimes audience comments—without any one activity dominating for an extended period of time. (Broda-Bahm, K., Kempf, D., 2004)

Proposition. The teams in a debate must have a specific topic to argue. This topic is worded in the form of a *proposition*— a statement to be proved. The proposition (also called the topic, resolution, or motion) should be very clear so that both sides know what they are to argue. Propositions allow debaters to research and think about their arguments in order to have well-informed debates.

Debate propositions can be roughly grouped into three general types:

A proposition of fact is a statement that can be proved using some kind of a measurement. When we can prove something using a statement based on an observable event or measurable facts, we say that the statement is an objective statement. When we make a statement and then use some agreed measurement to prove the truth of that statement, we are using objective verification. If the statement and the measurement match, then the proposition of fact is valid. If we make a statement and the measurement proves us wrong, then the proposition of fact is invalid.

A proposition of value requires the affirmative to persuade the judges to accept an opinion or value. You debate values all the time. When you argue a proposition of value, you are trying to provide evidence that your subjective opinion is better than the other team's. Arguing a proposition of value involves more steps than just making a statement and backing it up with a measurement.

A proposition of policy recommends taking a certain action. If you can justify a value and that value is based on facts, you are recommending that value as well as ways to promote the value. (Rybold, G., 2006)

The Burdens

A burden is a responsibility that each debater is given. Audiences and judges evaluate debaters based on how well they fulfill their burdens. Failure to meet the expectations of the burdens can result in losing the debate. Debaters share three types of burdens:

The burden of proof. The saying debaters use for this burden is, “Those who assert must prove.” Whoever wants to make a point (an assertion) must provide reasons and proof that their point is right. Points, or assertions, are significant, outstanding, or effective ideas, arguments, or suggestions that make up the case. Since most debaters are not experts about the topic they are discussing, they must use sources of evidence that

provide valid reasons to prove the position they are asserting. When a debater asserts a point without providing evidence, the other side may state the opposite (known as a counterpoint) without evidence, and both sides will tie on that particular point. If neither side gives evidence, the point is not proved and is considered moot, or still up for debate.

The burden of refutation. Refutation is the process of attacking and defending arguments. For this type of burden, you could say, “Silence is admission.” This means that if you present an argument in a debate and the other team does not address it, you win that point automatically, since by its silence the other side has admitted that you are right. The other team is not doing its job, which is to debate your arguments. You win the argument because the other team failed its burden of refutation. When you choose to answer each point or argument the other team presents, you are using line-by-line refutation, because you are following your opponent’s organization line by line in your notes and explaining to the judge why each point is wrong (each line in your notes would be another argument). You may also answer several of the other team’s arguments with only one or a few responses. This type of refutation is called grouping, because you take several lines of argument in your notes and group them together for your answers.

The burden of rebuttal. The saying for this burden is, “Answer the answer.” A good debate is like a good table tennis match: when one team hits the ball, the other team returns it. The other team refutes what you say. To refute means to prove something the other side said is wrong. You then have the burden of refuting. You have to prove that the other team’s argument or response is weak and your argument is stronger. (Rybold, G., 2006)

PRINCIPAL DEBATE FORMATS

Policy Debate (Cross-Examination)

Policy Debate is the most widely used format. It calls for two teams: the affirmative and the negative. Every speaker gets exactly the same amount of speaking and questioning time (cross-examination). The first four speeches are each nine minutes long, and each is called a constructive speech. During these speeches, debaters may propose or advance new arguments. After each constructive speech, the other team is allowed to cross-examine for no longer than three minutes. The affirmative gives the first constructive speech, followed by a cross-examination from the negative team. The negative gives the second constructive speech, followed by a cross-examination from the affirmative team. The affirmative is allowed to speak again for the third constructive speech, after which it is again cross-examined by the negative. Finally, the negative gives the fourth and final constructive speech, after which the affirmative cross-examines the negative. The teams use all four of their constructive speeches to propose their arguments and inform the audience about their evidence and reasoning to support their arguments.

The last four speeches of the debate are called rebuttals. During a rebuttal speech, the debaters are not allowed to present new arguments, since these speeches are meant to challenge the arguments the other team introduced in its constructive speeches. Debaters also use rebuttal speeches to defend their team’s arguments from

challenges by the other team. Each rebuttal is six minutes long. The negative gives the first rebuttal speech. The affirmative gives the second. The negative is allowed to speak again for the third, and the affirmative gives the fourth and final rebuttal speeches. (Broda-Bahm, K., Kempf, D., 2004) (Rybold, G., 2006)

9 min.	First Affirmative Constructive
3 min.	Cross-examination of first affirmative speaker (by second negative speaker)
9 min.	First Negative Constructive
3 min.	Cross-examination first negative speaker (by first affirmative speaker)
9 min.	Second Affirmative Constructive
3 min.	Cross-examination of second affirmative speaker (by first negative speaker)
9 min.	Second Negative Constructive
3 min.	Cross-examination of second negative speaker (by second affirmative speaker)
6 min.	First Negative Rebuttal
6 min.	First Affirmative Rebuttal
6 min.	Second Affirmative Rebuttal
6 min.	Second Negative Rebuttal

Parliamentary Format

The parliamentary format is probably one of the most recognized formats the world over. The format has the advantage of a relatively short duration and nearly constant interaction. The format includes the honorific titles: the team usually referred to as “Affirmative” is called “Government” and includes a Prime Minister and a Member of Government; and the team usually referred to as “Negative” is called “Opposition” and includes a Leader of Opposition and a Member of Opposition. These terms may or may not be used.

This format lacks specifically set-aside times for questioning, but includes the possibility for questions offered throughout the first phase of the debate. Once a constructive speech has completed its first minute but before it has entered its last minute, an opposing speaker may rise at any point and request a “point of information” — that is, the speaker requests permission to ask a question. At that point, the speaker holding the floor can either accept the question and answer it, before moving back into his speech, or he can say, “No, thank you,” and continue on with his speech. The strength of this feature is that it offers a chance to address a point just after it has been made. A weakness is that, if overused, it can be distracting to the speaker and the audience.

Another advantage of this format is that it allows for audience participation in the form of “floor speeches” — audience members may make challenges or ask questions of the debaters. (This format requires a firm-handed moderator to keep the floor speeches and responses within appropriate limits.)

A variation on the parliamentary format (World style or British/European Parliament) involves four teams at a time, two government teams and two opposition teams. While such a format permits the involvement of a much larger number of debaters, it also takes substantially more skill in order to maintain clear argument development and refutation. (Broda-Bahm, K., Kempf, D., 2004)

- 7 min. Government: Prime Minister's Constructive
"Points" allowed after first minute and before last minute.
- 8 min. Opposition: Leader's Constructive
"Points" allowed after first minute and before last minute.
- 8 min. Government: Member's Constructive
"Points" allowed after first minute and before last minute.
- 8 min. Opposition: Member's Constructive
"Points" allowed after first minute and before last minute.
- 15 min. Floor Speeches (2 minutes each)
- 4 min. Opposition: Leader's Rebuttal
- 5 min. Government: Prime Minister's Rebuttal

Lincoln–Douglas Format

This format receives its name from a series of debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas for the Illinois seat of the U.S. Senate in 1858. Focusing largely on the question of slavery, the debates continue to convey the ideal of one person's ability to influence public attitudes and events. It is promoted as a format that emphasizes advanced preparation, a basic understanding of philosophical and value conflicts, a moderate use of evidence, and a conversational approach toward delivery. Today, Lincoln-Douglas debate is the only major format to feature, instead of teams, one speaker against another speaker.

This format uses two people: one for the affirmative and the other for the negative. The main differences between Lincoln-Douglas and other team debates is that there are fewer speeches and you will not be able to depend on a partner to help you. It has the advantage of promoting a simpler, shorter, and more personal contest.

The Lincoln-Douglas format offers a one-on-one debate including constructive speeches, rebuttals and questioning time in less than 35 minutes. Though the total speaking times are equal, the affirmative speaks three times (beginning and ending the debate) while the negative speaks twice. Each begins with a constructive speech to lay out his principal argument, with the negative debater's speech being a bit longer so as to include both case development and refutation. The affirmative debater has two short rebuttals in which to refute the negative's case, defend his own, and conclude the debate.

(Broda-Bahm, K., Kempf, D., 2004) (Rybold, G., 2006)

6 min.	Affirmative Constructive
3 min.	Questioning by negative
7 min.	Negative Constructive
3 min.	Questioning by affirmative
4 min.	First Affirmative Rebuttal
6 min.	Negative Rebuttal
3 min.	Second Affirmative Rebuttal

Karl Popper format

A relative newcomer to the debate world, the Karl Popper format is named after a Viennese philosopher who opposed the idea of absolute truth, embraced the notion of multiple perspectives, and developed the ideal of an “open society,” based on a respect for different points of view, protection of minority rights, and a defense of free media. The format usually focuses on propositions of general value, but has recently included propositions of policy as well. The style encourages advance preparation, but also encourages creativity and the reliance on common knowledge and reasoning. The heavy reliance on quoted materials that is characteristic of American policy debate is not a feature of Karl Popper debate, but research is encouraged, and competitors frequently receive packets of published articles related to the proposition prior to the tournament.

The Karl Popper debate format calls for two teams: affirmative and negative. This format accommodates three speakers per team and provides just one speaking opportunity for each speaker (although four of the six speakers also conduct questioning). Its strength is that it includes a greater number of speakers and provides a gentle introduction to debate for less-experienced speakers. (the responsibilities are somewhat uneven: the first speakers on each team have a total of 12 minutes on stage; the second and third speakers on each team have 8 minutes apiece.)

One challenge of this format is to maintain continuity between the speeches. The third speaker needs to defend the same arguments that were extended by the second speaker and introduced by the first speaker. This need for continuity is present in other formats as well, but when speakers make only one speech each, there is a correspondingly greater need to communicate among the partners. The first speech from the affirmative side has the goal of laying out the team’s main arguments. The first negative speaker follows, developing not only that team’s case but also their refutation of the affirmative’s arguments. The two speeches that follow are designed for extending the arguments and the refutation of each side, but not for introducing new arguments. A final speech from each side provides an opportunity to compare and summarize.

(Broda-Bahm, K., Kempf, D., 2004)

6 min.	First Affirmative (Constructive)
3 min.	Questioning of first affirmative (by third negative)
6 min.	First Negative (Constructive)
3 min.	Questioning of first negative (by third affirmative)
5 min.	Second Affirmative (Rebuttal)
3 min.	Questioning of second affirmative (by the first negative)
5 min.	Second Negative (Rebuttal)
3 min.	Questioning of second negative (by the first affirmative)
5 min.	Third Affirmative (Rebuttal)
5 min.	Third Negative (Rebuttal)

Public Forum

Public Forum (also called Ted Turner Debate *or* Controversy) is one of the newest events. Public Forum attempts to get more students involved by making the event an audience-oriented contest, usually without expert debate judges involved.

Debaters use evidence but usually will not read it verbatim during the debate. The two-person teams in Public Forum are pro (affirmative) and con (negative). The proposition can either be a policy or a value topic.

Instead of cross-examination speeches, Public Forum has crossfire. During this time, the debaters who just finished speaking can ask and answer questions of each other.

The summary speeches allow the debaters to recap the best arguments for their side. This is a chance for more refutation but not new arguments. In the last shot, each team will reprise the one argument that they believe will win the debate for them. (Rybold, G., 2006)

4 min.	Team A Speaker 1
4 min.	Team B Speaker 1
3 min.	Crossfire (between Team A Speaker 1 & Team B Speaker 1)
4 min.	Team A Speaker 2
4 min.	Team B Speaker 2
3 min.	Crossfire (between Team A Speaker 2 & Team B Speaker 2)
Summary 2 min.	Team A Speaker 1
Summary 2 min.	Team B Speaker 1
3 min.	Grand Crossfire (all speakers)

The “Town Hall” Format

This is a format for two teams that includes a focused period for audience interaction. Based on a form of debate used at the National Communication Association’s “Town Hall Debates” held at the association’s annual conventions, this 50–60 minute format has proven to be useful and popular for public on-campus debates as well.

Through the first four speeches, the first half hour of the debate roughly, the audience hears from each of the speakers, and hears each speaker ask questions and answer questions. The goal of the four constructive speeches is to lay out all of the arguments for one’s side and to introduce all of the planned refutations against the other side. Up to this point, the debate follows the pattern of the policy debate format described above. After all four debaters have been heard, there is a 15-minute questioning period, during which audience members can make their own arguments or can directly question the speakers. A moderator can handle this audience participation period by providing individual speaking times to audience members who would like to give speeches from the floor (2 minutes, for example) or by simply letting audience members speak for a reasonable amount of time.

The moderator should attempt to balance the questions and statements for the two sides as much as possible—for example, by allowing the other side time to answer or react to a question that was asked of their opponents.

Finally, the debate ends with two summaries presented by each side. This summary, presented by one member of each team (it doesn’t matter which one) reviews the main issues of the debate and provides reasons why the speaker’s side should be chosen the winner. (Broda-Bahm, K., Kempf, D., 2004)

5 min.	First Affirmative Constructive
2 min.	Questioning of first affirmative (by second negative)
5 min.	First Negative Constructive
2 min.	Questioning of first negative (by first affirmative)
4 min.	Second Affirmative Constructive
2 min.	Questioning of second affirmative (by first negative)
4 min.	Second Negative Constructive
2 min.	Questioning of second negative (by second affirmative)
15 min.	Audience Speech/Question Period
3 min.	Final Negative Summary
3 min.	Final Affirmative Summary

A “Quick Debate” Format

Debates sometimes must be accomplished in very short amounts of time. Debaters with experience in tournament debate, as well as public policy advocates, may feel that any issue worth debating needs at least an hour of debating time—but it is possible to offer the core of a debate, the fundamental give and take on the central controversy, in far less time. The following format requires only 10 minutes, and provides two speaking opportunities and a questioning opportunity to two sides.

This format requires speakers to have both discipline (selecting only one or two arguments) and a great deal of word economy. While the abbreviated format may not permit very complete argument development or extension, it does allow the basic points of view to be communicated and contrasted.

As such, it might be ideal for a program that includes debate along with other activities—for example, a talk show or a radio call-in show. Starting such a program with a quick debate may be an excellent way to gain attention and briefly communicate the gist of the controversy. (Broda-Bahm, K., Kempf, D., 2004)

2 min.	Affirmative Constructive
1 min.	Questioning of affirmative
2 min.	Negative Constructive
1 min.	Questioning of negative
2 min.	Affirmative Summary
2 min.	Negative Summary

LISTENING AND FEEDBACK (REACTING TO GROUNDED CRITICISM)

FOCUSING ON LISTENING SKILLS

What one should realize, listening is not simply the act of retaining what is heard. This activity is not ‘neutral.’ The listener is engaged in purpose-driven activity. The purpose that one has for listening have a large impact on what will be emphasized, what will be selected, and what will be retained (Broda-Bahm & Kempf, 2004).

As a college student, you will spend a great deal of time listening to others. From orientation sessions to classroom lectures, not to mention one-on-one conversations with professors, administrators or other college staff, you will find yourself at the receiving end of orally presented information. Not only is the ability to

listen effectively a key factor in your success, but also listening is a skill that anyone can improve (Rowh & Ed, 2010).

What we should clear up first about listening is that it is not only for meaning and understanding (which is fairly easy for most people), but also listening to let the other person know that he has been listened to (which is the real challenge). We also need to be aware of our nonverbal behaviors because how we react and present ourselves influences how others listen to us. Think of some of the bad listeners you know. They probably have these habits:

- They make comments or ask questions that having nothing to do with what you have just said.
- They never look at you.
- They multitask (e.g., work on their computer or talk on their phone while they are listening to you).
- They look bored, uninterested.
- They have one expression on their face throughout the conversation.
- They fidget (e.g., play with their pencil or objects on their desk).
- They walk away as you are talking and say, “Keep going, I am listening.”
- They fake attention and pretend to listen.
- They never ask questions, clarify, or paraphrase.
- They finish your sentences for you or interrupt when you are talking (Topchik, 2003).

But Why Is Listening So Difficult?

Listening is one of the most difficult skills. Very few people have ever had training in how to listen. It is estimated that most of us only listen at about 30 percent of our capacity. That means we are missing 70 percent of the message, or 70 percent of all the messages sent to us. Listening is such a difficult skill to acquire mainly because of three factors (Topchik, 2003):

Committee of People. Concentrating on the information being given to one, s/he is thinking about many other things as well. S/he may be thinking about what they’ll have for lunch or dinner, how their afternoon meeting will go, who’s picking up the kids today, or one is thinking about whether he or she will call later, sex, or one’s recent or upcoming vacation. This is normal behavior, and according to the psychologists, it is very healthy as well. What is happening is that there’s a committee of people (not real people, of course) traveling with us wherever we go that’s always trying to take us away from the situation. Our committee of people is particularly with us when we are bored or uninterested in the situation or conversation at hand. But the committee is also with us at the most opportune or important listening times in our lives.

Human Brain Physiology. The human brain is too developed or sophisticated for the listening process. It can do so many other things at the same time. This is another reason why listening is so difficult. Unless we have

been trained, or have practiced a lot, it is difficult for most of us to focus on one person or one conversation at a time.

Noise Factors. Noise factors are barriers to listening. They are the specific things that prevent us from listening to others. Noise factors can be either internally (our own personal barriers) or externally (from the other person or the environment) generated. There are literally hundreds, maybe thousands, of these noise factors. Here's just a partial listing of these noise factors:

Internal Noise Factors

- Your emotional state (e.g., angry, anxious, depressed, stressed)
- Your physiological state (e.g., hard of hearing, poor eyesight)
- Illness or wellbeing
- (e.g., backache, the flu, overly tired)
- Personal biases, prejudices, perceptions, assumptions
- Thinking about what you will say instead of listening to the speaker
- Preoccupation with your own issues or situation, having your own agenda
- Mind reading what the other person is thinking or feeling
- Searching for the right kind of advice or recommendations to give
- Going to any lengths to avoid being wrong
- Placating because you want people to like you
- Personal values and beliefs

External Noise Factors

- Language differences
- Difficulty understanding accents or word pronunciations
- Speaker's use of slang or jargon or acronyms that you are not familiar with
- A boring subject or topic, or a topic you have heard a hundred times before
- Monotonous or monotone voice of the speaker
- The workplace environment (e.g., room temperature too hot or too cold)
- Background noise (e.g., machines running, pagers going off, phones ringing, alarms, or sirens that impede your ability to hear)
- The personality, grooming, appearance, or attire of the speaker
- The speaker's title or position within the organization

The Benefits of Listening Well

You can't be a truly effective communicator if you are not a good listener. Like radio stations that send out a stream of information without responding to any incoming signals, people who talk without listening are not truly communicating. They are "broadcasting." Becoming known in your workplace as an effective listener brings a number of benefits that will pay big dividends to your organization—and to you.

You'll Get More Things Done Right the First Time. What percentage of your work must be redone because you missed key steps when the procedure was being explained? Listening well helps you get the instructions, and therefore the work, right the first time.

You'll Learn More. Effective listeners are able to get the "big picture" faster because they've taken the time to access the resources around them: coworkers and managers or supervisors. Employees increase their value to the organization by listening.

to others. They understand more about their products and services, as well as know where to go for answers when they get into a jam.

Other People Will Listen to You. Another benefit of being a good listener is that when you do speak, your words are valued. In the eyes of coworkers, good listeners have earned the right to be listened to. And, since good listeners talk less, their words are a rarer commodity, and worth more for it. We quickly tire of people who are always talking. Their words are diminished through overexposure.

Your Work Environment Will Be More Harmonious. An effective listener is usually better in conflict situations, is more likely to see each viewpoint in a problem-solving session, and generally earns greater respect in the workplace than a poor listener. Without becoming the office "counselor," a good listener knows that some coworkers simply need to be heard. By offering a few minutes, a good listener is able to relieve tension and assist coworkers in getting back to a productive level of work. An effective listener contributes to office harmony to the same degree that a poor listener takes away from it!

(McIntosh, P., Luecke, R., Davis, J.H., 2008).

STRATEGIC LISTENING

If this heading sounds odd, then it is only because we have conventionally (and, we believe, inaccurately) thought of listening as a passive process—we open our ears, we relax, we receive the information. Decades of research on the listening process and its successes and failures, however, have demonstrated that this model is anything but accurate. Hearing (the physiological process of converting sound waves into auditory stimuli) differs from listening (the mental process of selecting, attending to, meaningfully organizing and retaining heard information) in essential respects. While we can't listen without hearing, we can hear without listening. Imagine debaters whispering to their teammates with questions like these: “*What was their second argument? Did they ever respond to our example? How does this fact support their side of the debate?*” Uncertainties like these may be symptoms of poor listening behaviors. If you aim to be an effective listener in the context of a debate, you should maximize the experience by following a few important steps (Broda-Bahm & Kempf, 2004):

- *Focus your attention.* A debate situation is replete with potential distractions: worrying about your own speech, communicating with your partners, thinking about the audience. All of these elements deserve your attention as well, but when another advocate is speaking, your ability to contribute meaningfully to the debate depends on your ability to prioritize your attention on that advocate's speech.
- *Construct as you listen.* Don't just pay attention to the words as they go by. Instead, actively try to identify the speaker's main ideas, support and strategy. “What is the most important element here?” is a good question to ask while you are mentally processing the information that you hear.
- *React as you listen.* Think about your own assessment. Can you critique the information? Supplement it? Extend it? Think of alternate or additional examples or support?

THE SIX SKILLS OF EFFECTIVE LISTENING

To reach this highest level of listening proficiency, you need to develop six separate skills that may be combined into the easy-to-remember acronym CARESS (Alessandra, 2006):

1. **Concentrate.** Focus your attention on the speaker and only on the speaker.
2. **Acknowledge.** When you acknowledge the other person, you show your interest and attention.
3. **Research and respond.** Gather information about the other person, including his or her interests and objectives.
4. **Exercise emotional control.** Deal with highly charged messages in a thoughtful manner, and wait until the entire message is received before reacting.

5. **Sense the nonverbal message.** Be aware of what the speaker is saying with his or her body language and gestures.
6. **Structure and organize the information as you receive it.** This is what you do with the time gap between speaking and hearing speeds.

Let's look at each of these skills in more detail.

1. Concentrate Completely on the Speaker. You must eliminate noise and distractions. These barriers may be in the environment, like noises in the room, other people talking, poor acoustics, bad odors, extreme temperatures, an uncomfortable chair, or visual distractions. Or they could be physical disruptions such as telephone calls or visitors. Another kind of barrier is something distracting about the speaker. Maybe he or she dresses oddly, shows poor grooming, has disturbing mannerisms, confusing facial expressions, or odd body language. Or perhaps he or she has a thick accent or an unappealing presentation style. Yet another barrier has to do with you, the listener, and can be either physical or psychological. Maybe it's close to lunch or quitting time, and you're preoccupied with how you feel. You're hungry or tired, or angry, or maybe have a cold or a toothache. If so, you're not going to be listening fully.

Another physical barrier could be your proximity to the speaker. If he or she's either too close or too far away from you, you may feel uncomfortable and have a hard time concentrating. A second sort of internal barrier is psychological. Perhaps you're closed-minded to new ideas or resistant to information that runs contrary to your beliefs and values. Or maybe you're bored, daydreaming, or jumping to conclusions.

So there are lots of potential distractions, both internal and external. If you can't avoid them, minimize them. You do that by focusing totally on the speaker and paying attention. Here are four specific techniques that will help you concentrate while listening:

- Take a deep breath.
- Consciously decide to listen.
- Mentally paraphrase what the speaker is saying.
- Maintain eye contact.

2. Acknowledging the Speaker. This is the second technique of the CARESS model. Think about how you like to be listened to. What are the important responses you look for in other people when they are listening to you? Here are four things most people mention:

First, eye contact. As we just discussed, this is a sign of attention. When you don't have eye contact with your listener, you may feel like you're talking to a brick wall.

Second, verbal responses and vocal participation such as, "Hmm," "Yeah," "Wow!", and "No kidding?" These show interest in what's being said.

Third, other acknowledging gestures such as smiling, nodding one's head, leaning forward with interest, directly facing the speaker, and appropriate facial expressions or body language. All of these gestures say, in effect, "I'm really interested in what you have to say." Speakers like to see that.

And, the **fourth** kind of acknowledgment is making clarifying remarks that restate the speaker's points, such as "If I understand you correctly, you're saying that ..." or "In other words, the biggest hurdles are ..." Use these techniques, and you'll show courtesy to the speaker. Equally important, you'll enrich yourself by joining in a give-and-take that increases your understanding.

3. Researching. "Researching" is what makes a conversation a two-way street. And it's this two-way flow that creates a meeting of the minds between the speaker and the listener. Researching, as the term is used here, involves asking questions and giving feedback, and it serves many purposes. For example, it allows you to clarify a message, enlarge upon a subject, or go into a particular topic in more depth. It allows you to get the speaker to change the direction of the conversation. Or it can prompt the speaker to vent feelings of anger, excitement, enthusiasm, and so on. And it also allows you to support and reinforce particular parts of a speaker's message.

A listener who doesn't ask questions, give feedback, or make comments at the appropriate time isn't really participating. This creates an information imbalance that can, at best, make the speaker uncomfortable and, at worst, make for major misunderstandings.

Asking the right questions at the right time and responding appropriately to the speaker is an essential part of active listening. Skillful questioning simplifies the listener's job because it gets the speaker to "open up" and to reveal hidden feelings, motives, needs, goals, and desires.

4. Exercise Emotional Control. What causes an emotional overreaction? It's generally prompted by the speaker himself or by something he or she says. For instance, going to an elegant party dressed like a bum might influence the hosts negatively. On the other hand, wearing a high-powered, Wall Street-like suit might put a rural businessperson on the defensive against a supposedly not-to-be-trusted city slicker.

Severe emotional overreaction can also be caused by loaded topics, such as ethnic, racial, religious, or political references. Differences in values, beliefs, attitudes, education, speed of delivery, image, and a host of other factors can cause a disruption in communication.

So, as listeners, we tend to tune out when we see or hear something we don't like. As a result, we often miss the true substance of what's being said. When your emotional reaction begins, you'll have an almost irresistible tendency to interrupt, to butt in, and to argue. You may feel your pulse speed up, your breathing become more rapid, or your face become flushed. You may lose your train of thought. Once you recognize this negative emotional reaction, you can redirect it with the following techniques:

First, pause to delay your response or reaction. It's the tried-and-true approach of counting to ten, or taking in some long, deep breaths. These can really work to calm you down.

A **second** calming technique: Think about what you have in common with the speaker, rather than focusing on your differences. Maybe you don't disagree with the person's motivations—such as raising more money for the school. You just don't agree with her solutions.

And **third**, imagine yourself calm and relaxed. Think of a time in your past when you were laid-back, on top of the world, and feeling incredibly great. Visualize that experience as vividly as you can. When you exercise emotional control, you'll find that active listening is no longer a struggle.

5. Sense the Nonverbal Message. It's critical that you read the nonverbal messages in the speaker's communications. If you don't, you're missing a major aspect of his or her message.

Professor Albert Mehrabian has pioneered the understanding of communications since the 1960s. He established this classic statistic for the effectiveness of spoken communications:

- 7% of meaning is in the words that are spoken.
- 38% of meaning is paralinguistic (the way that the words are said).
- 55% of meaning is in facial expression.

So 93% of meaning is derived from nonverbal communication. Thus being able to listen nonverbally to others is essential for success.

6. Structure. Structuring the information is probably the most sophisticated of the listening techniques. As I said earlier, you can use the time gap created by differences in listening and speaking speeds to structure the message you're listening to.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR NOTE TAKING

As mentioned above structuring other people's talks on paper (or taking notes) is very important for being a good listener. Like listening note taking is not 'neutral' and note taker is engaged in purpose-driven activity. Unless you are one of the world's fastest writers (or listening to one of the world's slowest speakers) you are bound to write much less than what is being said, perhaps one word for every twenty or more words that are spoken. For that reason, your selection of what you notice, prioritize, organize and write down has a large influence on how the event is going to be captured.

In addition, it goes without saying that note taking is a personal act. Your notes are just that—*your* notes. What you would select and what you would find useful to record for your own or for an opponent's speech is not likely to be the same or necessarily similar to what another person would record and select. While there are certainly better and worse ways of taking notes, more and less useful techniques of recording, there is no unambiguously right way to take notes from a given speech. For this reason, debaters generally rely on their own notes rather than the notes of their partners. For one thing, it is often difficult to read someone else's handwriting—especially handwriting produced under the stressful conditions of a debate. More important, when you rely on your own notes, you are recognizing the fact that by taking notes you are mentally organizing what you are hearing. Many who have had the experience of being a student know that you take notes in class not simply because you want to re-read the notes again at a later time, but because the acts of recording and structuring are ways of processing the information; they aid your understanding during that moment even if you never look at the notes again. Sometimes, instructors are very good at letting students know exactly when they have moved on to a new main point; more commonly, however, someone listening casually to an instructor will not realize that during the last twenty minutes the instructor has made three distinct points, supporting each one with two illustrations (Broda-Bahm & Kempf, 2004).

So here are some general guidelines for taking notes (Broda-Bahm & Kempf, 2004).

1. Keep It Simple. Remembering that only a fraction of what is said will end up being recorded, it is important to record an advocate's *key ideas* and not the words that an advocate happens to be saying at any given moment. To discern the key idea, you must simplify and select. For example, the following might represent what is spoken and what is written:

Spoken: "A hallmark of our nation's purpose and strength, free speech is not a mere luxury. Indeed, it is a necessity of a free people to use the power to speak without hindrance on any subject, to criticize as well as to compliment, that is one of the very building blocks of the form of government that we have come to call democracy."

Written: "Free Speech promotes democracy."

2. Use Meaningful Abbreviations. An alternate way of representing the argument above might be:

Written: “F.S. --> Dem.”

Removed from its context, that abbreviation may not mean anything, but for someone who has been studying and preparing a debate and dealing continuously with the ideas of free speech and democracy, and who recognizes the arrow symbol as “leads to,” or “promotes,” the phrase would have sufficient meaning and could be jotted down in less than a second.

More specific word abbreviations would depend, of course, not only on the language that you are working in, but also upon the subject area and your familiarity with it. It is no savings in time to use an abbreviation that will tax your own recollection. If you have reached a point of familiarity on the free speech topic, for example, that “F.S.” will have meaning to you, and it saves time to use it; otherwise, the use of “free speech” or “free sp.” or “free spch” will suffice. It is a good idea to begin using some common abbreviations in your own note taking as you gather material and information for your debate and then to continue to use those abbreviations in your own speaking notes and in your own flow sheet.

3. Impose organization. In many instances the act of taking notes will be an act of “creating order out of chaos.” The structure of an argument may not be obvious to the individual who is casually listening; indeed, the structure may not even be obvious to the person making it. A trait often found in very inexperienced (or overly confident) speakers is to simply speak off the “top of the head,” expressing thoughts as they enter the mind. Facing such a speaker, a note taker could say with exasperation, “It is impossible to take any notes because the speech has no structure.” But that is not an acceptable excuse. Good note takers will find a structure even if they have to impose it themselves. Ideally, the note taker will be able to say, “Well, he spoke for four minutes without explicitly identifying any key ideas, but there were three essential claims that he kept coming back to and those are”

4. Record Your Own Reactions as You Write. If you can think of a response as you are listening, then you may save time by writing the response rather than the argument that led to your response. For example, if the other side presents a quotation from 1963 on a matter of global economics, then instead of writing the source and its date, you might write in the space available for your own speech, “’63 is too old—too much has changed.”

All of these general note taking strategies are not skills that can be quickly learned, but at the same time they are skills that can apply, not only to taking notes in public debates, but to taking notes in any situation. Individuals who are used to recording minutes in meetings or in a classroom will find that the ability to simplify, the ability to abbreviate, and the ability to create organization are all essential skills for creating a useful record of an oral event.

REACTING TO GROUNDED CRITICISM

Even in today's age of communication, there are still many messages we do not want to receive. For example, truthfully, most people would prefer not to receive feedback on their performance. It is not the positive aspects of performance evaluation that we dread, but rather the negative. Receiving this kind of feedback threatens our self-image, ego, and perhaps even our motivation.

When we look at the title of this paragraph „Reacting to Grounded Criticism” most of us focus on the last word - „criticism”, whilst the main word is the last by one - „grounded”.

So what is the difference between criticism and feedback?

1. Very often, feedback is defined as *criticism which is constructive* and offers some guidance for future learning.
2. Criticism is more often felt to be destructive, lacking in support and generally seen in a negative context (Stogdon & Kiteley, 2010).

While dealing with criticism we should consider next things:

- Criticism can be painful.
- It can make you feel angry, upset or frustrated.
- It can make you feel powerless (Stogdon & Kiteley, 2010).

So how do we deal with the above? To separate the feelings from the content is something that is fundamental if the criticism is to be used in a productive way and reflects some of the very basic tenets of social work theory and practice. The way that one is able to recognize how emotions can influence his/her response to criticism will be an important part of their professional development.

One can see that receiving negative feedback about one's performance is definitely a perspective-changing experience. It is intended to be. Presented properly, negative feedback can serve to help the person correct performance problems that could ultimately impact their future job security. When there are issues that need to be addressed, negative feedback needs to be part of the overall communications that people receive about themselves. Not addressing these problems would be an injustice to the individual by allowing him/her to continue to perform below standards with no indication that their work is unacceptable.

These are the scenes when an unsuspecting “victim” is called into their boss's office one morning only to be told that after 27 years of loyal service to the company, they are being let go due to their performance. KA-BOOM! As the shocked employee's entire career flashes before his eyes, he is being handed a severance check and escorted to the front door into an awaiting taxi. He hears something about not being considered a top performer over the years and that as part of the company's recent downsizing program, only the very best performers are being retained.

“Funny,” he thinks to himself, “nobody ever mentioned that they weren’t pleased with my work for the past 27 years,” as the taxi speeds away.

This is what really might happen when people receive little or no feedback about their deficiencies on their performance until it is too late for them to do anything about it.

Why does this happen? The most obvious answer is that it is simply easier. Supervisors generally don’t enjoy giving people negative feedback about their performance any more than people like to receive it. Instead, we tolerate poor performance rather than address and try to correct it (Garber, 2004).

GIVING NEGATIVE FEEDBACK GUIDELINES

When appropriate and presented correctly, negative feedback can be some of the most potentially valuable information about yourself that you might ever receive. Often, it is the feedback that is the most difficult to hear that allows us the most growth opportunity. With negative feedback, you need to keep an open mind and be willing to accept what you hear. The following are ways in which one can use negative feedback in the most positive ways possible:

1. Be knowledgeable about the individual’s performance. Know exactly what performance you are addressing. As with any feedback, be prepared to give examples of the individual’s poor performance.
2. Give the person a chance to defend him- or herself. Don’t rush too quickly to judgment before you have heard their side of the story. Listen to their reasons and rationale for their behavior and performance. Be willing to accept the fact that there might be factors beyond the person’s control for these problems. Plan for ways to correct or address these factors to help the person improve his or her performance.
3. Don’t give the person a “mixed message.” A mixed message is one where you hear two seemingly contradictory things at the same time. If you have a negative message to deliver to someone, then just do it! Don’t try to sugarcoat it by wrapping it up in complimentary feedback and sandwiching it in between. This doesn’t really “soften” the blow or make negative feedback any easier to accept. It will only serve to confuse the person more. Make it clear what performance needs to be improved and why. Don’t have the person leave not knowing if he or she was told that they were doing a good job or a bad one.

An example of a mixed negative feedback message might sound something like this:

“I want to talk to you about your work on the new project. You have been doing a good job keeping everything on schedule so far. However, the accuracy of the numbers you have been providing seems to be way off. Accuracy is critical to the success of the entire project. Mistakes made now can cause us millions of dollars to correct later on. You need to ensure the accuracy of your numbers from now on. By the way, I really enjoyed the update presentation you gave on the project the other day. I know everyone was very impressed with the job you are doing so far.”

What message would this person leave this meeting hearing? Would it be that he or she is doing a good job or bad? One might argue that this person would feel that overall he or she was doing well, but had to concentrate on improving in one area—accuracy. However, the communications would be much clearer if these two types of feedback were given on separate occasions. They could be given on the same day, but not at the same time. This way, the importance of the accuracy of the data would not be diluted by the other information, and there would be a greater chance of the person understanding how his or her performance needs to improve. The positive feedback is equally important and should not be forfeited in order to deliver the negative to avoid a mixed message.

- Be constructive. Negative feedback should be constructive in its intent. If the reason for delivering negative feedback is anything other than to constructively help the individual, then it should not be delivered. The person should be told the following concerning his or her unacceptable performance: Why the performance is not meeting requirements. What the person must do to improve this performance. How this performance will be measured and how improvements will be communicated to the person in the future. When the person’s progress made toward the desired performance goals will be reviewed and how frequently.
- Consequences need to be understood. People seem to fear the worst when they hear negative feedback about their performance. Negative feedback needs to include at least some discussion about its ultimate consequences. If it is a “do or die” situation, then this needs to be told to the person. Similarly, if there are little or no consequences associated with this negative feedback, then this should be explained as well

Finally, dramatizing the significance of negative feedback will not ultimately serve the supervisor very well. One can only cry “wolf” so many times before everyone becomes conditioned not to listen anymore. Of course, just as in the story, one day a real wolf might happen by and no one will respond to the cries for help (Garber, 2004).

ACTIVITIES

Your experience of criticism

Think about your experiences of being criticized in the past and consider how your present responses may well have been influenced by these earlier messages. To help you to do this, note down your responses to the following questions:

- Do you feel that *you* rather than your *actions* are the subject of criticism?
- Is it possible to separate the action from the person and to see the criticism in a more objective way?

It may be helpful to look at the factors which influence your responses to criticism:

- Criticism, whether constructive or not, can be a very uncomfortable feeling and there is a real risk that a defensive response is the knee-jerk reaction.
- The temptation to ‘shoot the messenger’ and try to discredit the credibility of the person giving the criticism is a sure way of learning very little from criticism, other than to convince yourself that the way to deal with criticism is to criticize.

FURTHER READING

Bretzing, B.H., Kulhary, R.W. (1979). *Note-Taking and Depth of Processing*. Contemporary Educational Psychology 4, no. 2.

Burke, D., Pieterick, J. (2010). *Giving students effective written feedback*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

California High School Speech Association. (2004). *Speaking Across the Curriculum : Practical Ideas for Incorporating Listening and Speaking Into the Classroom*. IDEA Press.

Collins, S. (2009). *Effective Communication : A Workbook for Social Care Workers*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Einstein, G.O., and oth. (1985). *Note-taking, Individual Differences, and Memory for Lecture Information*. Journal of Educational Psychology 77, no. 5.

McIntyre, S. (1992). *Lecture Note-taking, Information-processing and Academic Achievement*. Journal of College Reading and Learning 24, no. 1.

Moss, B. (2007). *Communication skills for health and social care*. London: Sage.

Nichols, M.P. (1995). *The Lost Art of Listening*. New York: Guilford.

Nicol, D. and Macfarlane-Dick, D. (2006) *Rethinking Formative Assessment in HE: A Theoretical Model and Seven Principles of Good Feedback Practice*.

www.tlitt.strath.ac.uk/REAP/public/Resources/DN_SHE_Final.pdf

Wolvin, E., Coakley, C.G. (1996). *Listening*. Dubuque, IA: Brown & Benchmark.