

International Day of Listening Professional Activity

Author Jennifer Grau

I. Activity Title: First Hit the Pause Button

Interest Area (Check One): ___Personal Professional ___Education

Appropriate Age or Grade Level Teen to Adult

Time Required 20 minutes per round, 2 rounds suggested, 40-minutes total

II. Purpose

People often feel interrupted when they have more to say and someone either changes the topic or direction of the conversation or talks over their word and takes over the speaker role.

Objectives: Eliminate interruption, avoid over talk, manage the pace of the conversation, increase patience, topical coherence, and comfort with silence.

Skill Development – awareness of conversational pace, self-regulation, remembering what you want to say while listening to someone else.

III. Materials Needed

- A conversational partner who is willing to allow you to record your conversation
- A (phone, tape recorder, video camera) with which to record the conversation
- A timer that tracks seconds if not part of the recording device
- Something with which to take notes

IV. Instructions

- Find a conversational partner who is willing to allow you to record a conversation between the two of you.
- Pick a topic for discussion. The topic is not important as long as you both have something to say on the subject.

Round 1: Baseline recording

- Record a 5-minute conversation between two people.
- With your partner, or later when you are alone, listen to the conversation.
- Focus on the times you transition from listening silently to your first word when you speak.
- Pay attention to the following things:

1. Was there over talk? If so note how many times (e.g. 4 times in 5 minutes?)
2. If there was over talk, note how many seconds each instance of over talk lasted? (e.g. time 1 lasted 1.5 seconds, time 2 lasted 3 seconds, time 3 lasted .5 seconds, time 4 lasted .5 seconds)
3. Was what you said topically coherent or did you hijack the conversation and redirect the focus? For each instance note: "yes" (I remained topically coherent), "not sure," or "no" (I changed the topic/direction).

Round 2: Intentional listening recording

- Before your next conversation with this person, remind yourself of your objective to create a pause between turns of talk and to remain topically coherent. Remind yourself of what you stand to gain by these objectives (creating a more caring conversational environment, gaining more information, gaining the respect of your conversational partner etc.)
- Now commit to this new conversational rule – before I take a turn at talk I must count to 3 (could be 10 if you count fast) while squeezing my finger or tensing my toes. One squeeze / tensing for each count. This should be done in a way that is not noticed by others. During this time consider if what you are about to say is a conversational hijack (in which case don't do it) or something that is on topic.
- Again record a 5-minute conversation between the same two people.
- With your partner, or later when you are alone, listen to the conversation.
- Focus on the times you transition from listening silently to your first word when you speak.
- Pay attention to the following things:
 1. Was there over talk? If so note how many times (e.g. 4 times in 5 minutes?)
 2. If there was over talk, note how many seconds each instance of over talk lasted? (e.g. time 1 lasted 1.5 seconds, time 2 lasted 3 seconds, time 3 lasted .5 seconds, time 4 lasted .5 seconds)
 3. Was what you said topically coherent or did you hijack the conversation and redirect the focus? For each instance note yes I remained topically coherent, not sure, no I changed the topic/direction.

V. Resources:

International Listening Association Website: www.listen.org

Other internet resources: None, other than the following comment. This exercise is based on a story told by Ian Wang who at the time he told the story was the Australian Ambassador of Trade to Japan. He developed the technique of squeezing his finger 100 times before speaking.

VII. Outcomes and Evaluation (What should participants have accomplished, and how will you measure success?)

With practice and intention, the frequency and length of over talk or interruptions should decrease and the number of topically coherent turns should increase.