

EFFECTIVE LISTENING: OR, HOW TO LEARN SOMETHING AND IMPRESS YOUR PROFESSORS ALONG THE WAY

WHY LISTEN?

Listening, as you'll learn in CATA 101, is an active process that includes selecting, organizing, interpreting, and judging information (in contrast to *hearing*, which is the passive, physiological act of sound waves hitting your eardrums). Listening takes energy and attention; we need to work at it.

So why listen, if it involves energy and work? Faculty in ILA, CATA 101, and all your courses will add to this list, but two major reasons to develop your listening skills are that:

1. We learn through listening—it's how we process and remember information.
2. Faculty see when you're listening. We like that, and it builds your credibility.

SUGGESTIONS FOR EFFECTIVE LISTENING

Julia T. Wood, the author of the textbook you'll use in CATA 101, focuses on what she calls being "mindful." Mindfulness, according to Wood, "is being fully engaged in the moment" (176), or actively paying attention to a speaker, a professor, a friend, or anyone who is presenting important information that you might need.¹

A good thing about Wood, as you'll see in CATA 101, is that she gives a lot of suggestions for improving communication skills, including mindfulness. To become more mindful—say, in an ILA convocation, where the size of the room and number of people present can often be very distracting—Wood suggests (177) that you:

1. "Empty your mind of thoughts, ideas, and plans so that you are open to listening to another."
2. "Concentrate on the person with whom you are communicating. Say to yourself, 'I want to focus on this person and what she or he is saying and feeling.'"
3. "Don't be surprised if distracting thoughts come up or you find yourself thinking about your responses instead of what the other person is saying. This is natural. Just push away diversionary thoughts and refocus on the person with whom you are talking."
4. "Evaluate how well you listened when you were focusing on being mindful. If you aren't as fully engaged as you want to be, remind yourself that mindfulness is a habit of mind and a way of listening. Developing it takes practice."

¹ Julia T. Wood. *Communication in Our Lives*. 4th ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2006).