**Active Listening Exercises**

Here are some ideas for exercises which encourage students to appreciate that active listening is an important skill.

**Exercise A Chinese Whispers** – a useful ice breaker and introduction to active listening

* Have your students in a line and whisper 2 different messages - one starting at one end of the line and one starting at the other.
* Play music, encourage giggling etc.
* When the messages have been passed to the final person ask the original recipients if they can first of all remember the message and then the final recipients what message they received.

This exercise enables tutors to draw out all of the areas that stop us from actively listening and then this can lead into a discussion about what can be done to ensure active listening.

**Exercise B1 Inner Voices**

* Split students into pairs, allocate one the role of A and one the role of B
* Take B's out of the room and ask them to wait outside
* Inform the A's that whilst they are listening to their partner, every time their partner says something that evokes their "inner voice" which prompts them to want to ask a question, makes them think about something etc... they put their hand up for 5 seconds, then put it back down.
* Ask them to do this for the entire conversation - A's are not allowed to interact with B's, ask questions, confirm understanding, etc. A's remain silent throughout, just raising their hand every time their “inner voice” kicks in.
* Next inform the B's outside that they are to speak to A's about something of interest, an experience, their last holiday, anything positive that has happened to them in the last 6 months. They have 3 minutes to talk.
* Ask B's back into the room, then allow 3 minutes of talking from B's
* At the end of the 3 minutes ask the B's how they felt whilst talking to A, emotions evoked, etc. General answers might include "I didn't feel listened too, I didn't understand why they were putting their hand up, I lost my train of thought because they obviously weren't listening" etc.
* Debrief the group to consider the barriers and what they might do to overcome these.

**Exercise B2 - a variant on B1**

* Have half the group outside the room and ask those in the room to think of a topic they are really passionate about/interested in - eg family, films, football team etc.
* Those outside room come back inside and pair up to listen actively to the story. However you have pre-warned them to stop listening (demonstrate this) after about 30 seconds and see what happens.
* Usually the speakers get really frustrated and annoyed, leading to useful debrief discussion on the impact of listening and how to listen.

**Exercise C The Best Holiday Ever?**

* Have the students work in pairs: one is the listener and one will be the talker.
* The talker has to describe what they want from a holiday but without mentioning a destination.
* Listener has to practice active listening skills – listening attentively to what is being said and what is not quite being said, demonstrating their listening to the talker by their behaviour.
* After 3-4 minutes the listener has to summarise the 3 or 4 main issues or criteria that they have heard the talker explain about their ideal holiday and then make a tentative sale of a suitable destination.
* Allow 1-2 minutes to review how close the listener was to what the talker said and needed. Plus 1 min to review how well they demonstrated active listening behaviours.
* Swap roles and repeat, perhaps selecting a different topic.

Then review pulling out key learning points about what the students discovered about listening actively

**Exercise D I’ve started, you finish**

* Students are given a topic to discuss.
* At various points you (tutor) say ‘stop’, at which point the next student in line must continue the last student’s sentence, starting with their last few words.
* Once the group gets the hang of this, instead of following the same pattern (1 to 2 to 3 to 4 to 1 etc) you now identify who has to continue next part of the statement, encouraging all students to listen closely to what everyone is saying instead of just listening to the person speaking immediately before them.
* Initially the students can start somewhat shakily, but as they focus the exercise can become fun and supports the process of carefully listening to what is being said.

**Other resources**

Even though academics often dismiss Wikipedia there are some great resources and articles on active listening in this section:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Active_listening>