Tips for Public Speaking

**Active Listening**

**Why is active listening important in the public speaking process?**

Active listening is a crucial element of being a beneficial group or audience member. Active listening means that you are not merely hearing what someone is saying to you, but rather you are intentionally focused on verbal and nonverbal communication with the goal not to simply respond but to understand.

How can I improve my active listening skills?

1. **Awareness**

It is a step in the right direction to first be aware that hearing and active listening are vastly different actions! Reflecting on your own communication patterns and your goals when you are listening to someone speak can point out areas where you can increase focus. For example, many people often listen to a person describing an obstacle in their life while simultaneously thinking of solutions - a noble reaction to wanting to help someone, certainly! This is not active listening, however, because much is being missed in this multi-tasking effort. Recognize that this is a tendency for you and be aware that it may continue to crop up as you work on improving your active listening.

1. **Listen to understand, not to respond**

A common barrier to active listening is that we have a tendency to listen as it connects to how we plan to respond. This is a significant obstacle to authentic understanding in all sorts of relationships and situations. It narrows our intake of information to what we already have most prominently in our own brains. Working on improving active listening requires fighting the urge to listen to simply respond.

1. **Actively respond**

You can demonstrate that you have been an active listener through actively responding! Respond to the speaker in a manner that expresses your understanding of what they shared and why it mattered to them. At this stage, it might be appropriate to authentically communicate your experience or thoughts as it relates to what has been said. Demonstrate that you have listened to what *they* have to say, not that you heard what you wanted to hear.