



# Summarizing, Paraphrasing, and Reflecting

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss how to practice active listening when communicating with others. In particular, we'll focus on:

1. Skills in Active Listening
  - a. Summarizing
  - b. Paraphrasing
  - c. Reflecting
2. When to Use Each Skill

## 1. Skills in Active Listening

As you learned in an earlier lesson, active listening is something that we can use as listeners to check in with the speaker to let them know that we are hearing and understanding their message.

While active listening itself is a skill, there are three skills in particular that are part of active listening:

- Summarizing
- Paraphrasing
- Reflecting

### 1a. Summarizing

When you **summarize** something, you are letting the speaker know that you get the key points. These key points are almost like a checklist; in fact, sometimes you might even want to make a checklist, depending on the circumstances and the situation.

In either case, the purpose of summarizing is to communicate to the speaker that you understand everything he or she said.

⇒ **EXAMPLE** You're talking to your neighbor who is getting ready to do a renovation in the downstairs of her home. It's an exciting time, but there's a lot to be done. She starts to share with you some things about the project.

She says, "You know, I'm just really frustrated. The workers were supposed to be here last week, and they weren't. We put off getting ready because they postponed the project. But now they're suddenly coming, so we have to clear out all the furniture. We have to find some place to put some things in storage, but we have to keep some of it in the house. We also have to find a place to board the dog for a while. I don't know, maybe my sister will do it. Otherwise, do you know the name of that kennel? I thought you said you knew somebody that ran a kennel you liked. Could you give me the name of the kennel, please?"

There's a lot to what your neighbor is telling you, so if you're going to summarize, you want your neighbor to know you heard the key points. You might say, "Wow, it sounds like you have a lot to do in the next few days. You have to clear all the furniture, find a place for storage, and figure out what to keep in the house. You also said you need to check on a kennel for the dog. You'd like me to find the name of the kennel for you? I can do that."

You summarize the list of tasks she told you by repeating back the key things you heard.



Summarizing can be a really important skill, particularly in a work situation where you're on a new project, and you want to make sure that you understand all the key issues or next steps involved.



### Summarize

In active listening, repeating key points of a speaker's message to show understanding.

## 1b. Paraphrasing

The next skill involved in active listening is **paraphrasing**, or restating in your own words what you heard from the speaker. Unlike summarizing, paraphrasing is not the complete checklist but more of a general understanding.

⇒ **EXAMPLE** In the situation with your neighbor, you might say, "Wow, so you've got a lot going on. You have to deal with the furniture and the dog, and you'd like some options for where to board the dog. I'll be happy to help you with that."

In this way, you let your neighbor know in a very general sense that you've heard the key issues about the furniture and boarding the dog. As you paraphrase, you convey that you got heart of the message; you heard what was said.



### Paraphrase

In active listening, restating a speaker's message in the listener's own words to show understanding.

## 1c. Reflecting

Another key skill that's equally important in active listening is to **reflect** back what you hear. Reflecting focuses on the emotional content of the message. You may have all the key points and a general understanding of the content, but there can also be some emotional content that you might want to reflect back.

⇒ **EXAMPLE** In the situation with your neighbor, you might say, "Wow, it sounds like you're frustrated with the delays in the project, and there's so much that you have to do in such a short time. That sounds really stressful." By responding like this, you reflect back something that you have heard in terms of emotional content.

You typically pick up on that emotion through:

- Tone of voice
- Body language
- Word choice

People don't always say, "I am very frustrated," but you can often understand that through what you hear.



**TERM TO KNOW**

### Reflect

In active listening, indicating that the emotional content or purpose of a message has been heard and understood.

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## 2. When to Use Each Skill

Which of the three skills is best to use will depend on the situation and on what you're picking up verbally and nonverbally from the person who's talking.

It's also possible to use more than one skill. You might paraphrase something and then step forward to reflect the emotion that you hear as well.

Typically, if you feel like the way in which you responded wasn't enough, you can respond again using another one of these skills.

The point of responding is to:

- Be present.
- Show the speaker that you want to understand.
- Give the speaker your undivided attention.

However, a response is not the same as an agreement. A response lets the person know that you have heard them, not necessarily that you agree with what they are saying.

There might be instances where someone is very upset or angry about a particular person or event, and you want them to know that you understand how they feel and view this event. You might not necessarily agree, but you see where the person is coming from.



#### BIG IDEA

Active listening is a key skill in communicating with people. While it's particularly useful in conflict resolution, active listening is important to use whenever someone who is speaking to you wants to make sure that you have heard and understood what they said.



#### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that while **active listening itself is a skill**, there are three additional skills involved in active listening: summarizing, paraphrasing, and reflecting. You now understand that **when to use each skill** will depend on the situation as well as the speaker's verbal and nonverbal communication. It's also possible to use all three skills, or to respond again in a different way than you did initially. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### Paraphrase

in active listening, restating a speaker's message in the listener's own words to show understanding.

##### Reflect

In active listening, indicating that the emotional content or purpose of a message has been heard and understood.

##### Summarize

In active listening, repeating key points of a speaker's message to show understanding.