OPTIONAL LISTENING EXERCISES

M2.S2: Handout

These are examples of some lively activities you can use to demonstrate different aspects of communication in our work. They can be done as energizers or as activities to highlight content in the sessions on methods and approaches to facilitation.

**Blind Count Off (10 minutes)**

Have all participants form a circle and face outward, away from one another. The group must see how high they can count as a team, with only one person saying a number at a time. If two or more people say the same number, the group must start again from 1.

This is a fun icebreaker that focuses on the importance of listening to and communicating with one another.

**Stop Listening (15 minutes)**

1. Take half the group outside the room and instruct them that when they return, they will be paired with someone in the room who will tell them about something they really like. Instruct these “listeners” to find different ways to be distracted and stop listening after a minute or so.

2. Ask those remaining in the room to think of a topic they are really interested in (e.g., sports, food, culture). Then tell them that they will be paired with someone outside who will listen to the “speakers” share about their topic of interest.

3. Bring the “listeners” back in and form pairs. Give the “speakers” a few minutes to share their topic.

4. End the exercise and debrief.

5. Ask the speakers how they felt during the exercise. Were they frustrated, annoyed, angry, etc.? How would they have liked the “listeners” to act?

6. Ask the “listeners” if they have any comments to share about the experience.

7. Ask participants what they will take away from this exercise.

8. Note: This can be done in variations, such as a “fishbowl” style exercise in plenary with two participants, or the facilitator and a volunteer, or in small-group fishbowl settings.

**Telephone Game (5–15 minutes, depending on variation)**

This is a well-known game in which a message is whispered to the first person at the end of the chain, and then it is whispered down the chain of people to the other end to see if it changes. This can be done with any age and works well with large groups. There are some variations on the classic game:

a. Have two messages, one starting at each end of the chain.

b. Have each person write down the message before repeating it. Afterward, track where changes happened as the message was passed along. Discuss reasons for changes. This would work best in smaller to medium-sized groups.

c. Play the game in a loud setting, such as the gym or the cafeteria, or create a distraction. Compare the resulting final message with the one in the original version of the game.

d. Include one nonsense word in the original message (for example, “glimbot” or “gripshun”). Trace it to see how it changes and how other words change.
Debrief at the end of the exercise to reflect on:

- What factors contributed to any miscommunication that happened?
- How might those be prevented in our daily interactions?
- What will you take away from the exercise and apply in your work?

**Do I Understand You? (10 minutes)**

This is an exercise that focuses on strategies to understand content when it may not always be apparent. This can be done in pairs, or in any kind of fishbowl setting. The speaker’s topic could also be adapted to fit the context of the training if that is relevant.

1. Have two participants volunteer to be a talker and a listener.
2. The talker will have to talk about something they want without stating what it is. You can determine what that is; for example, a trip they would like to take, a meal they would like to eat. Give them a couple of minutes to prepare.
3. The listener has to practice active listening skills – listening attentively to what is being said and what is not quite being said – and demonstrating their listening to the talker by their behavior.
4. After 2-3 minutes, the listener has to summarize a few of the main points that they have heard the talker express, and then make a tentative suggestion of what the talker was referring to.
5. The pair review how close the listener was to what the talker intended.
6. Debrief in plenary, or with the fishbowl observers, how the listener demonstrated active listening behaviors.

**Round Robin Exercise (10 minutes)**

This can be a challenging exercise and is best done in medium-sized groups (around 10).

1. Participants form a line and are given a topic to discuss. You could suggest, “What are community-level child protection approaches?”
2. Explain that one person will begin speaking; when asked to stop, the next in line has to pick up and complete the last sentence the previous speaker said.
3. Ask the first participants in line to begin speaking; after 20–30 seconds or so, say “stop,” and have the next person continue.
4. Variation: Once the group gets the hang of this, instead of following the same pattern (1 to 2 to 3 to 4 to 5, etc.), the trainer names who has to continue the next part of the statement, forcing all delegates to listen closely to what everyone is saying instead of just the person before them.
5. Debrief with the participants about what was challenging and what they did to focus on the speaker.

**Bus Driver Exercise (5 minutes)**

This should be adapted to a mode of transportation that is common in the context (e.g., matatu, jeepney). In advance prepare a small “script” with an imaginary bus route to read out, such as:

You are the bus driver. At the first stop, two women got on the bus wearing scarves. At the second stop one woman got off the bus, and two teenage boys in jeans got on the bus. At stop 3 an old man with a bag got on the bus, and one teenage boy got off the bus, etc.” (maybe up to 5 stops)
1. Tell the participants that you will read a short description of a bus route (or other), and they will be asked questions about the details. They can take notes.

2. Read through the route until the end.

3. When you have finished, ask the participants: “What is the bus driver’s age?”

4. Did the participants remember you saying “you are the bus driver?”

5. Debrief.

Open Questions Role-play' (15 minutes)

The training exercise works best with no more than 10 participants. It focuses on practicing observation and active listening skills, as well as using open-ended questions. It is based on an extract from a poem by Rudyard Kipling:

“I keep six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who.”

1. Position participants in a horseshoe shape (seated or standing). Have the six words written on a flip chart or PowerPoint. Keep them on visible display throughout the activity.

2. Tell participants that you are going to practice the use of open-ended questions, which will test their listening and observational skills.

3. Ask for a volunteer who is asked to leave the room.

4. The group must decide something they want to know about the volunteer, e.g., favorite sport, food, movie, vacation place – something specific and within the bounds of privacy and decency!

5. When the group have decided on their secret question, invite the volunteer back in to sit at the front. He or she must then make a statement – anything. The volunteer does not know the question, so they are encouraged to say anything that comes to mind, like On my way here today, I saw a squirrel.”

6. The volunteer then turns to the first person in the horseshoe. That person can ask any OPEN question, but it has to be based on the last thing that comes out of the volunteer’s mouth, and any subsequent question must include any or all of the last words to come out of the mouth of the volunteer.

7. This continues until the questions lead to the speaker answering the question decided by the group.

For example—The question is, What is your favorite football team?

Participant 1: - What color was the squirrel?
Volunteer: Grey
Participant 2: What other colors are there besides grey?
Volunteer: Red
Participant 3: What other things are Red?
Volunteer: Apples/Blood/Robins/Traffic Lights
Participant 4: (DISASTER COMING) Do you like Robins?

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1 William Chadwick - LinkedIn Group of QED Associate Freelancers. [https://www.sessionlab.com/methods/open-questions-role-play](https://www.sessionlab.com/methods/open-questions-role-play)
Volunteer: YES! - (Disaster - a closed question has been asked. Somebody was not listening, but help is at hand with Number 5)
Participant 5: When you say YES, what do you mean? (forcing the volunteer to open up)
Volunteer: I like red things, especially my favorite football club’s color.
Participant 6: What is your favorite football club?
Volunteer: Manchester United.

Ground rules:

- The volunteer must always tell the truth, but if they detect or suspect the content of the secret question, they have a mandate to be as difficult as they like with evasive or short answers. This will further test the interviewer’s skills.
- People are not allowed to go out of sequence or confer. You will see people at one end of the table dying to jump in.

Debrief at the end: Was this difficult? How did you strategize the questions to ask? How was it not to know the direction the conversation would go in?