Tips for Listening During a Discussion

✓ **Be prepared!** Make sure you have read the material assigned for class or watched videos assigned, writing down possible questions as you read or watch a film. If an article, story, or chapter is going to be discussed in class, be sure you have marked in the margins specific items you want to question or address in class.

✓ **Repeat a discussion question or another student’s comment to be sure you heard it correctly and then respond.** Sometimes during a discussion, students ineffectively express an idea or concept, but repeating it back to them can clear up any miscommunication or unclear intention. This method of discussion also shows respect for the other person’s ideas by beginning a response with, *so are you saying that . . . .* Also, when you finish adding to a discussion, ask if everyone understands your point or ask if someone has another perspective. Try to finish remarks with another question to keep the discussion moving.

✓ **Listen to the responses of others and use these as a springboard for your own responses.** Rather than shifting topics abruptly by bringing up something that doesn’t relate to the topic at hand, play off the comments of other participants to build a point you want to make. For instance, expand a point made by providing a concrete example of it, or use a person’s comment to introduce a contrasting viewpoint. Creating smooth transitions between topics during a discussion helps develop critical thinking skills for workplace tasks as well as classroom discussions.

✓ **Jot down key points in the discussion.** It helps to quickly note good points made by other students during a discussion to use as a basis for your own comparisons. Recording key points will also help you remember the information for an exam or for a writing assignment.

✓ **Play devil’s advocate occasionally and present an opposing view on a topic even if you don’t believe in it.** Nothing creates a lively discussion faster than conflict. If everyone in the group agrees on a point, making a counter-argument will increase interest while forcing the group to test the validity of the more popular perspective. Remember that an argument is only as strong as one’s ability to effectively present and understand the opposing viewpoints.

✓ **Remain open-minded during the discussion.** Sometimes other students may present information that contradicts your values or beliefs. Instead of interjecting your own beliefs, listen to the other person’s argument, encouraging the person to present the entire argument; then consider the other person’s viewpoint before reacting or replying.