

## Figure 5.1. Critical Listening Exercise

---

- Find a partner whose identities differ from yours (preferably in at least two ways).
- Set a timer for 3 minutes. One partner should talk for that period on a topic of their choice. Those topics can range from the following ideas:
  - Talk about a time when you experienced or witnessed an event that was shaped by race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, or ability. What happened? Who was involved? What emotions did you experience in the moment? How did you respond?
  - The other partner listens, following this instruction: Pretend to be a recorder that will repeat back what your partner said. While listening, consider the following:
    - Put aside distracting thoughts.
    - Do not mentally prepare something to say.
    - Avoid being distracted by environmental factors, like phones.
    - “Listen” to the speaker’s body language.
    - Nod occasionally.
    - Use facial expressions to express you are hearing what your partner says.
    - Make sure that your posture is open and interested.
    - Encourage the speaker to continue with small verbal comments like “yes,” and “uh huh.”
- After the 3 minutes has ended, the listening partner will repeat what they heard their partner say. The speaking partner will correct any misinformation.
- Partners will debrief about their experience.
- The partners trade roles and repeat the activity.

### Extension to Critical Conversations

Now, take those active listening skills and use them during a critical conversation. When you are ready to respond, remember the following:

As a listener, your main goal is to **understand what is being said** rather than make assumptions or judgments. To help facilitate that listening, you might do the following:

- Check for understanding by saying, “What I’m hearing is . . . “
- Ask clarifying questions, such as “When you said BLANK, did you mean . . . ?”
- If you have an emotional response, say, “Right now, I find myself having an emotional reaction to what you said. To make sure that I understand what you mean, let me summarize what I heard.”

- Do not interrupt. Since the goal is to **encourage respect and understanding and gain information and perspective**, allow the speaker to finish their point before clarifying and/or sharing your perspective.
- When the time comes for you to speak and others to listen, make sure to be open, honest, and respectful.

---

Modified from: The Center for Creative Leadership (2019). The Big 6: An Active Listening Skill Set. Retrieved from [www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/coaching-others-use-active-listening-skills/](http://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/coaching-others-use-active-listening-skills/); and from Grohol, J. (2018). Become a Better Listener: Active Listening. *PsychCentral*. Retrieved from [psychcentral.com/lib/become-a-better-listener-active-listening/](http://psychcentral.com/lib/become-a-better-listener-active-listening/)