

Listening and Asking Questions

The **BIG** Idea

- What kinds of questions will give me the most information about careers?

AGENDA

- Approx. 45 minutes
- I. Warm Up: Listen to Me! (5 minutes)
 - II. Effective Listening (10 minutes)
 - III. Asking Questions (10 minutes)
 - IV. Keep the Conversation Rolling! (10 minutes)
 - V. Wrap Up: Career Fair Question Brainstorm (10 minutes)

MATERIALS

- STUDENT HANDBOOK PAGES:**
 - Student Handbook page 54, Be a Better Listener (OPTIONAL)
 - Student Handbook page 55, Career Fair: Presentation Questions
- Chart paper and markers

OBJECTIVES

During this lesson, the student(s) will:

- Identify effective (and ineffective) listening behaviors.
- Distinguish between open-ended and yes/no questions.
- Generate a list of career fair follow-up questions.

OVERVIEW

To prepare for the career fair, students learn about two important things they'll need to do as participants: listen and ask questions. They'll also discuss how these communication skills can be applied to everyday conversation—an essential life skill. To begin the lesson, students will discuss effective listening strategies. Then they'll learn about different types of questions to start and keep up conversation. Next, they'll practice asking follow-up questions to gather more information from a speaker. Finally, they'll come up with a list of follow-up questions they could ask presenters at the career fair.

PREPARATION

- Prior to the start of class, identify a student who will collaborate during the **Warm Up: Listen to Me!** activity by telling you a story that you'll pay absolutely no attention to. Explain their role and agree on a signal to begin.
- List the day's **BIG IDEA** and activities on the board.
- Write the day's vocabulary and definitions on the board.
- The following handouts need to be made into overhead transparencies or copied onto chart paper:
 - **Student Handbook page 54, Be a Better Listener (OPTIONAL)**
 - **Student Handbook page 55, Career Fair: Presentation Questions**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

As most adults know, conversation is an art—but it's also a skill that you can improve with a little advice and lots of practice. And the better you are at conversation, the more comfortable and confident you are in any situation, whether you're at a party, a job interview, or simply meeting a neighbor for the first time. But the importance of this skill may be a new idea to many students. After all, they may think “conversation” is just about chatting with their friends. They may avoid or feel uncomfortable speaking to new people or strangers. It's important for them to understand that communication skills will help them in every aspect of life—for the rest of their lives!

As students prepare for the career fair, this is a good opportunity to introduce and practice communication skills. After all, during the fair they must listen closely to presenters (their fellow

students), then ask questions to learn more. And listening and asking questions are the essential elements in good conversation! The focus of this lesson is good listening and asking questions that will start a conversation and keep it going. It's about empowering students to talk to anyone, anywhere, about anything.

VOCABULARY

Open-ended question: A question that cannot be answered with a simple yes or no.

Follow-up question: A question that asks for more information about something the speaker has just said.

IMPLEMENTATION OPTIONS

In **Activity II, Effective Listening**, you may wish to have pairs of students come up with their own examples of effective and ineffective listening before sharing them as a group. (You could also assign “effective” behaviors to half the pairs, and “ineffective” behaviors to the other half.) If so, you can use the top of **Student Handbook page 54, Be a Better Listener**, to keep students focused.

If your students have trouble coming up with open-ended questions in **Activity III, Asking Questions**, have them reword the yes/no questions at the bottom of **Student Handbook page 54, Be a Better Listener**.

If time permits, ask one or two students to take your place in **Activity IV, Keep the Conversation Rolling!** Students could answer questions as guests who have their assigned careers.

In **Activity IV**, you may wish to avoid tossing a squishy ball if you feel this might get too chaotic or detract from posing good questions. Instead, you could have students ask questions in order, from desk to desk, or call students at random to ask the next question.

In **Activity V**, you may wish to have students work on questions in pairs rather than small groups. You may also wish to create a class list of questions suitable for any career, to be duplicated and used as a guide during the career fair.

ACTIVITY STEPS

I. Warm Up: Listen to Me! (5 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Welcome back, everyone. Two weeks from now, we'll be headed to the seventh grade career fair. Part of your responsibility for the day will be presenting what you've learned to your fellow students. It will also be your responsibility to collect information about other careers. Today, we're going to discuss the two things you'll need to do to take advantage of that opportunity: listening and asking questions.
2. [At this point, signal the student you've identified prior to class to interrupt you with a brief observation about the career fair. As he/she speaks, you should remain completely uninvolved—yawn, rummage in your bag for papers, check your cell phone for messages, blurt out “that reminds me...” and launch into a story of your own. When the student is finished, say something like, “I'm sorry, what were you saying?”]

II. Effective Listening (10 minutes)

1. [Tell students that the first skill they'll need as career fair audience members is the ability to listen. What they've just seen is a good example of what not to do.]

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: What things did you observe that let [student's name] know I didn't care about the information he/she was giving me or about his/her feelings?

2. [Create two columns on chart paper: **Ineffective Listening** and **Effective Listening**. Record the students' responses under **Ineffective Listening**.]
3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Of course, one reason listening is important is that if you're not listening carefully, you'll miss out on what's being said. At the career fair, if you're not listening closely to the presenter, you're missing the main point of the fair—learning about careers!
4. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** But there's another very important reason to listen. How do you think my reaction to [student's name] made him/her feel? As you saw, listening is an essential part of common courtesy. This is especially important when someone is giving a presentation. I know each of you have worked very hard on your career fair presentations—and you all deserve the respect of being heard.

What can you do—as a listener—that honors the presenters and makes them feel they’re being heard? [Record the students’ responses under **Effective Listening**. If necessary, prompt students with questions like: How does a person’s posture show he or she is listening? Gestures? Facial expressions? Tone of voice? You could also look at the list under **Ineffective Listening** and write the opposite under **Effective Listening**, such as: “Looked through your purse” (ineffective) and “Look directly at the speaker” (effective).]

5. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** You can also use body language to show someone that you’re listening. There’s an acronym used to remind people of this, SLANT:
- Sit up
 - Lean in and Look at the speaker
 - Ask questions
 - Nod, as in, “I’m with you, I understand.”
 - Track the speaker (follow him or her with your eyes)

[Write this on the board.]

III. Asking Questions (10 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** The first thing you’ll need to know as an audience member at the career fair is how to listen. The second thing you’ll need to know is how to ask good questions.

Like listening, asking questions isn’t just something you’ll need to do at the career fair. Asking questions is the heart of any good conversation—and something that all successful people do. You’ve probably heard the term “art of conversation,” but conversation is also a skill that you can learn and get better at with practice. And it’s a skill that you’ll use for the rest of your life—as a student, a friend, an employer, an employee—whatever you do!

Asking questions is how you learn about the world—it’s how you discover and grow. If you’re uncomfortable asking questions, you’re not going to learn new things.

2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** There are three kinds of questions you need to know about. We’ll talk about each one in the context of everyday conversation as well as the career fair.

[List these on the board]

- First questions

- Open-ended questions
- Follow-up questions

3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Let's start with **first questions**. A "first question" is the very first question you ask someone when you meet them for the first time, whether it's a new teacher, a new student, or an adult whose career you want to know more about. What are some "first questions" you can ask to start a conversation?

[List student responses on chart paper and label the list **First Questions**. Examples: Where are you from? How long have you lived here? Where do you work/go to school? What do you do for fun?]

At the career fair, as in most presentations, you don't need a first question since the person has already been speaking about a particular topic.

4. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** A first question gets the conversation started, but you need to ask other questions to keep the conversation going. The secret is to ask **open-ended questions**, or questions that cannot be answered with a yes or no, or a single word. Open-ended questions allow people to talk for as long as they like, maybe tell a story. Questions that can be answered with yes or no, or a single word, are conversation-stoppers. For example:
- Yes/no question: Do you like school?
 - Open-ended question: What's the most exciting thing that ever happened at this school?

At the career fair, try to ask open-ended questions to get the most information. For example, if you ask: "Do you think you'd be nervous working in an emergency room?" you'll just get a yes or no response. You could learn a lot more by asking an open-ended question such as: "What kinds of things make you nervous about working in an emergency room?"

5. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Finally, there's the **follow-up question**. When somebody gives you information, you ask for a little more. You can plan some follow-up questions in advance, but most happen spontaneously, based on something you hear during the conversation. Of course, the best follow-up questions are also open-ended questions that can't be answered with a yes or no, or a single word.

At the career fair, you'll probably have one or two follow-up questions after each presentation. As you listen, you're likely to hear the presenter say something you'd

like to learn more about—or perhaps there’s something you don’t quite understand. For example, a presenter might say he didn’t feel the career was a good fit for him because of the hours. You might ask, “What are the hours like in your career?” And just as in a normal conversation, you can keep asking follow-up questions until you have the information you need. So if the presenter answers simply, “The hours are long,” you might ask a follow-up question such as: “Do most people with this career work long days during the week, or do they also have to work nights and weekends?”

Just like in everyday conversation, the more questions you ask, the more you’ll learn!

6. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Keep in mind that asking questions isn’t a way to “test” or annoy the presenter. In fact, asking questions is one way that you show you’re really listening to—and interested in—what he or she is saying. Along those lines, there’s one kind of question we all want to avoid: asking a question that the presenter has already answered. For example, say you end your presentation by sharing why you feel your career is a good fit for you. Then someone asks, “So, would you want a job in this career?” You’d probably feel insulted and irritated that the person wasn’t listening to your presentation!

IV. Keep the Conversation Rolling! (10 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** We’ve talked about two essential communication skills today—listening and asking questions. Now it’s time to test these skills with a game called “Keep the Conversation Rolling!” Striking up a conversation with a new person isn’t always easy. In fact, it can be hard after one or two questions to know what to say next. In this game, we’re going to keep the conversation rolling as long as we can. I’m going to play a special guest who’s visiting the school. The object of the game is to find out as much as possible about my job by asking questions.

You can start with a “first question,” such as “What brings you to [school name]?” or “What kind of work do you do?” After that, every question must be a follow-up question. In other words, each question must somehow relate to the answer I just gave. So, if I’m a baseball player, I might mention the off-season as I’m answering a question about physical training. For the next question, someone could ask a question about what I do during the off-season.

At the same time, try not to ask yes/no questions, since these don’t give you as much information!

To start the game, I'll tell you my name, then I'm going to throw this squishy ball to someone who must ask the first question. When I've answered the question, the student throws the squishy ball to someone else—then that student asks the next question. You have to listen carefully because you never know when it will be your turn next!

Our goal is to ask at least 10 questions.

2. [Play the game. If time permits, answer questions as another “special guest” or have a student answer questions based on his or her assigned career.]

V. WRAP-UP: Career Fair Question Brainstorm (10 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** At the career fair, you will listen to your peers give presentations on careers that interest you. The presenters will share basic information, but if you want to know more, you will need to ask good follow-up questions. Remember that yes/no types of questions are not as helpful to you as ones that result in longer answers with lots of information. Now that you know how to ask great questions, I'd like you to work in small groups to come up with questions to ask presenters at the career fair. Please turn to your **Student Handbook page 55, Career Fair: Presentation Questions**.
2. [Have students work in teams of four. The first person names his/her career, and each of the remaining three asks an open-ended question about it, writing down the question before handing the paper off to the next questioner. Remind students that they are trying to generate a list of 12 good questions as quickly as possible, three per career. No questions are to be answered at this time.]
3. [Once they've completed their lists, give teams about five minutes to review all their questions, find the two strongest ones, and reword them in a way that could apply to any career. Have them write these two questions at the bottom of the page. Have each team share its best questions with the class.]
4. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Terrific job today! Remember, the career fair is just two weeks away. Next week, you'll learn some tips for making a good presentation and have a chance to practice your own. And, of course, let me know if you have any questions or need any help before then!

Be A Better Listener

Part 1

Under “Effective Listening,” list behaviors that show someone you’re paying attention. Under “Ineffective Listening,” list behaviors that show you’re not listening. An example has been done for you.

EFFECTIVE (GOOD) LISTENING	INEFFECTIVE (BAD) LISTENING
Look at the speaker or take notes.	Do something else while someone is talking.

Part 2

Want to get lots of information? Ask open-ended questions! These are questions that require more than a yes or no answer. For each yes or no question on the left, write a new question that requires more explanation.

YES OR NO QUESTIONS	OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS
Do you have to go to college for this career?	How do you prepare for this career?
Do you work with other people?	
Do you work long hours?	
Is this job fun?	

Career Fair: Presentation Questions

Below, write the names of each career assigned to the members in your group. Under each career, each team member NOT assigned to that career should write one open-ended question. At the bottom, write two questions that would apply to any career.

Career:

Questions:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Questions for any career:

- 1)
- 2)