
Active Listening Course: Three Levels of Listening, Probing Questions, Silence and Summaries

26 – 30 April 2027
Amsterdam





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Programme Summary

Active listening is the subject of this one-week training course for directors, heads of function and senior managers who lead customer-facing and internal conversations, ending in a listening practice plan for three recurring conversations. Senior leaders often reply before they have heard the full message, so decisions rest on partial facts and colleagues stop offering them. The programme moves from the three levels of listening through diagnosis of habits to the design of questions, silence and summaries, then applies them to live conversations. Mars Training Centre UK delivers this active listening programme for leaders from mixed organisations.

The Business Case

When leaders interrupt, solve too early or listen only for what they expect, clients repeat complaints, teams withhold bad news and meetings end with different understandings of the same decision. Leaders who check what they have heard, ask open questions and allow silence hear problems sooner and spend less time correcting misunderstandings later.

- Decision Quality: Improves as facts and concerns are gathered before options are closed.
- Client Relationship Strength: Rises as clients see their concerns restated accurately and acted on.
- Rework from Misunderstanding: Falls as agreements are summarised and confirmed before the meeting ends.

Principles and Evidence Base

- Three levels of listening: They separate attention to oneself, to the content and to the whole person, and structure the self-diagnosis in Sessions 1 and 2.
- Paraphrasing and summarising: They give the method for checking meaning that is practised in Sessions 3 and 4.
- Open and reflective questioning: It shapes the probing sequences designed in Session 3.
- Listening for emotion and intent: It guides how tone and unspoken concerns are noticed in Sessions 2 and 4.

Intended Participants

- Directors who chair meetings where decisions depend on candid input from others.
- Heads of function who handle escalations from clients and from their own teams.
- Senior managers who give and receive feedback in appraisal and coaching conversations.
- Leaders of customer-facing units who must hear what clients mean as well as what they say.

Typical sectors include banking, healthcare, retail and public services.



Learning Outcomes

1. Participants will be able to distinguish the three levels of listening in recorded and observed conversations.
2. Participants will be able to diagnose their own listening habits and the effect of those habits on colleagues and clients.
3. Participants will be able to construct probing questions that open a topic without leading the answer.
4. Participants will be able to apply paraphrasing and summaries to confirm meaning before responding.
5. Participants will be able to evaluate the use of silence and pace in difficult conversations.
6. Participants will be able to justify a listening practice plan for recurring conversations to a sponsor.

Programme Structure

Day 1: The Three Levels of Listening

What are leaders listening to when they say they are listening?

- Three Levels of Listening Model
- Listening Observation Record
- Conversation Recording Review
- Attention Drift Log
- Listening Intent Statement

Day 2: Diagnosing Listening Habits and Barriers

Which habits shorten listening, and what do they cost?

- Interruption and Early Solution Tally
- Assumption and Bias Check
- Emotion and Intent Cue Sheet
- Colleague Feedback Summary
- Barrier Priority Matrix

Day 3: Designing Questions and Summaries

How do open questions and summaries confirm what was meant?

- Open and Probing Question Ladder
- Paraphrase Starter Bank
- Reflective Statement Practice
- Summary and Confirmation Template
- Question Sequence for Client Conversations



Day 4: Designing Silence, Pace and Difficult Conversations

How do silence and pace change what people are willing to say?

- Silence and Pause Protocol
- Pacing Guide for Meetings
- Escalation Call Script
- Appraisal Conversation Structure
- Repair Phrases after Misunderstanding

Day 5: Applying Listening Practice to Live Conversations

Does the practice hold in the conversations leaders actually have?

- Applying the Session 1 Model to a Recorded Call
- Testing the Session 3 Question Ladder in Role Play
- Rehearsing the Session 4 Escalation Script
- Revising Practice after Peer Feedback
- Completing the Listening Practice Plan

Methodology

The programme uses a structured exercise method built on recorded role plays, anonymised meeting transcripts, short written cases from banking and healthcare, and observation sheets. Participants practise in small groups, take turns as speaker, listener and observer, and receive facilitator and peer feedback on each attempt, so that practice is reviewed against evidence rather than impression.

- Suggested activity: Summarising a colleague's account without adding an opinion.
- Suggested activity: Handling a client escalation using only open questions.
- Suggested activity: Holding a ten-second pause before replying in a mock appraisal.

Capstone Output

Each participant completes a listening practice plan for three recurring conversations. It holds a personal listening profile, a question sequence, summary phrases, a pacing approach and a feedback routine. The plan is used at work to prepare for client meetings, appraisal discussions and escalations, and to review progress with a sponsor or coach.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is active listening suitable for leaders who already communicate well?

Yes. Active listening is taught for experienced leaders and assumes regular responsibility for meetings, clients or teams, not earlier training in communication.



Which models does active listening rest on in this programme?

Active listening here rests on the three levels of listening, paraphrasing and summarising, open and reflective questioning, and listening for emotion and intent.

How is the active listening practice plan used at work?

You use the plan to prepare for client meetings, appraisal discussions and escalations, and to review your listening progress with a sponsor.

How does active listening differ from a programme on public speaking?

Active listening centres on receiving and checking what others mean, while public speaking centres on delivering a message to an audience.