



# COMMUNICATION GOES TWO WAYS

*Students try out an activity that requires clear two-way communication to be successful.*

## OBJECTIVES

- Students will experience how one-way verbal communication is limiting.
- Students will practice giving detailed directions.
- Students will see the value of active listening skills.

## MATERIALS

### Students will need:

- One piece of paper (per round)

### Teacher will need:

- Online learning platform such as Zoom  
(Zoom instructions in orange, this training suggests using the breakout room and whiteboard or chat features)
- PowerPoint PDF download

## TIME

45 min

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## LESSON INTRO

Automatically assuming that your listener understands what you are saying can be dangerous. Often, when we are giving directions or expressing our thoughts, our hearer understands something very different than we mean. This can lead to much misunderstanding and frustration on both sides.

## FACILITATOR TIPS AND NOTES

1. Based on the reaction of the students, adjust your reflection and flow of the lesson to connect with what is resonating with them.

## LESSON STEP BY STEP

1. Say: “We are going to do an activity that might tell us some important things about communication. To begin, everyone needs one sheet of paper. Hold the sheet of paper in front of you. During this activity you must close your eyes. No peeking! Also no talking during the game. Simply listen closely and follow the directions I give you.”
2. Give the following directions (the teacher should also be doing these actions along with saying the directions to the students so that they will have the finished model once the activity is over):
  - Fold your sheet of paper in half. (Give students time to do each step)
  - Now tear off the upper right-hand corner.
  - Fold it in half again and tear off the upper left-hand corner of the paper.
  - Fold it in half again. Now tear off the lower right-hand corner of the paper.
  - Now unfold the paper.
3. Say: Open your eyes and see what design you have created! If I did a good job of communicating, and you did a good job of listening; all of our paper designs should look the same!
4. Hold your sheet up for the group to see. *It is highly unlikely that any of them will match yours.*
5. Have students hold their papers up to the screen for all to see. Observe differences. There may be much laughter or complaining that you didn’t give good directions.
6. Ask the group why their papers did not match yours. ASK: “How could there be so many versions when I gave everyone the same instructions?”

They may say things like:

  - Your directions could be interpreted in different ways
  - You went too fast
  - What did you mean by “*fold in half*”
  - You didn’t let us ask questions
7. Ask: Whose fault is it that all of our papers looked so different from each other? Point out to the group that maybe you did a poor job of communicating. Or maybe they did a poor job of listening. Encourage discussion.
8. Ask if any other student would like to try to give directions more clearly to see if a greater percentage of the class can successfully fold/tear the paper as they are folding it.
9. Ask the group **what they can do as listeners**, or what the facilitator can do, to improve the communication. Take suggestions and encourage them to implement their ideas.
10. Allow time for round two, assessment of the paper designs, and discussion about how the group’s new communication strategies worked.
11. **Share your screen** to view the PowerPoint slides: The listener rarely makes the same assumptions as the speaker. Or a more concrete statement for younger groups: The listener usually hears something different than what the speaker means.

12. Ask the group how this statement connects to the activity that they just did. Do students agree? Disagree?
13. Ask: How can we minimize the loss of information between the speaker and the listener?  
(as students share, write their ideas onto the whiteboard feature)  
*Listen for examples of communication strategies that emphasize communication as a two-way and interactive process, rather than speaker-driven.*  
*Highlight that listeners are also an important part of the process by asking questions and telling what they are hearing.*
14. Identify strategies from the student-generated list that are Active Listening Skills. Ask students what they already know about Active Listening.
15. Try another round of the activity with a new student facilitator. Eyes still closed, but this time, encourage the group (as listeners) to practice active listening skills as they go through the activity.
16. Ask: how did that round compare to the previous rounds?

## REFLECTION & WRAP UP

1. Remind students that communicating has to be an interactive process so that the speaker and the listener can understand each other. Often when someone is told something, he or she will interpret the message based on personal experiences, which can change the original intent of the message.
2. Ask students to write their definition of ACTIVE LISTENING based on their experience in this activity. Invite students to **share their definition via chat**.

## VARIATIONS

1. Have students try the activity in pairs during some of the later rounds rather than as one facilitator for the whole group.
2. You can debrief this activity through the lens of **conflict resolution** with the following reflections:
  - What do you notice about all of our papers?
  - How did you feel when you saw what your paper looked like in comparison to everyone else's papers? Did anyone think they had done the exercise incorrectly when they saw others' papers?
  - How could there be so many interpretations when I gave everyone the same instructions? Was there one right way to do this exercise?
  - Let's consider that the paper represents your opinion or perspective, what does the exercise tell you about perspectives?
  - Why might it be useful to look at something in a different way or from a different perspective? What can we learn from looking at things differently?

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## NOTES

**Source:** <https://www.usip.org/public-education/educators/paper-folding-activity>

**Educational Standards:** CASEL: Relationship Skills; P21: Critical Thinking and Problem Solving; P21: Social and Cross-Cultural Skills; CCRS:SL3 Evaluate Perspective and Evidence; CCRS:SL4 Present Information