



## 2 Simple Strategies To Improve Listening

By Michael Linsin

The difference in learning and behavior between a class that listens well and one that doesn't is monumental.

It's also an area many teachers struggle with, as evidenced by the scores of emails we receive each week. The good news is that it isn't hard to improve.

What follows are two simple strategies—applied one right after the other—that will result in better listening almost immediately.

### 1. Stand and Stretch

Before beginning an important lesson or activity, ask your students to stand, push in their chairs, and take one step back so that they're not leaning against their desk.

Position yourself in front of the room, pausing until every student is quiet and watching you. Once you have their attention, lead them in a series of stretches.

First, to the sky, where they'll reach as high as they can while standing on their tiptoes. Next, have them reach toward the floor, and then straight out to one side and then the other. Hold each stretch about 10 seconds.

Don't worry about being perfect. The idea is to get the blood flowing, to clear the cobwebs, and to refresh depleted energy stores, which any short spurt of exercise will do.

After breathing deeply through two or three rotations, move on to the next strategy.

## 1. Practice Good Posture

As soon as your students return to their seats, ask them to sit up straight and tall and with their feet flat on the floor (if they can).

Now, it may feel old fashioned to do this, especially given the importance of allowing for individual differences in learning. But all students listen better when practicing good posture.

You may certainly allow them to kneel on their chairs during group discussions, or slouch while independent reading, but sitting tall is a fundamental tenet of good listening.

This doesn't mean that your students must sit rigidly or awkwardly. It just means that while you're giving instruction, sitting in an upright position will improve listening and engagement.

It will keep your students alert and energized. It will enhance breathing and oxygen delivery to the brain and groove a success habit that shows respect for the speaker.

### Listening Is A Skill

A refreshed class, bright-eyed and sitting tall, will always be infinitely more engaged and participatory than one that lolls about, sluggish and devoid of muscle tone. They'll always be more respectful, more interested, and more attentive.

But they don't get that way magically.

Listening is a skill you teach and a habit you cultivate through your words and actions. It can be improved, often drastically, with simple strategies like the tandem above.

But you must act rather than bemoan. You must teach rather than accept. You must provide your class with the tools common to successful students worldwide rather than give in to the myth that they learn better when doing what comes naturally.

When you put your students in position to listen well by periodically shaking out the cobwebs and resetting good, healthy posture, their faces will alight with the undeniable glow of learning.

A place where they forget where they are, where your lessons ring clear and true, where they hear and then understand.

The way it's supposed to be.