



How To Speak So Students Listen

By Michael Linsin

It's common for teachers to bemoan the state of listening in their classroom.

"Sometimes I feel like I'm talking to myself."

"I say it over and over again, and they still don't get it."

"It's almost as if they've completely tuned me out."

But rarely will they point to themselves as the reason.

Rarely will they look inward and analyze their own practice.

They assume that students either listen well or they don't, and that they have little to do about it.

But the truth is, you have a profound effect on listening.

Consistency, temperament, likability, clarity, presentation skills, and even tidiness are all important factors.

There are also strategies that can improve listening almost instantaneously, which you can find in [our archive](#).

But one of the most important factors is how you speak when giving directions. What follows are three simple changes that can make a big difference.

1. Talk less.

Most teachers talk too much. Their voice is a looping soundtrack to every day – reminding, warning, [micromanaging](#), and guiding students through every this and that.

If you cut the amount of talking you do by a third, and focus only on what your students *need* to know, then what you say will have greater impact.

Your words will reach their intended destination, and your students will begin tuning you in rather than tuning you out.

2. Lower your voice.

It's common to increase your volume to get students to listen better. But a loud voice is unpleasant and *too easy* to hear. It causes them to look away and busy themselves with other things.

When you lower your voice, however, and speak just loud enough for students in the back of the room to hear, they instinctively lean in. They stop moving and rustling.

They read your lips, facial expressions, and body language. By requiring a small amount of effort, your students will listen more intently.

3. Stop repeating.

When you repeat the same directions over and over, you train your students not to listen to you the first time. You encourage apathy and lighten their load of responsibility.

Saying it once creates urgency. It motivates action and causes students to stay locked in to the sound of your voice.

It also invests them in their learning. They begin to understand that education isn't something that is done *to* them. Rather, it's something they go out and get for themselves.

Stay The Course

If you're struggling with listening, the above strategies will do wonders. At first, however, they may cause [things to get worse](#).

Because your students have grown accustomed to you taking on the burden for their listening, they may very well ignore you.

They may become even slower to action.

This is normal. It tells you how far learned helplessness has taken root in your classroom. But once they feel the shift in responsibility from you to them, they'll begin to change.

They'll begin looking at you, tracking your movements, and anticipating what you want them to do next.

They'll begin nodding their heads and eagerly completing your directions.

They'll become empowered to do for themselves because responsibility feels good. It's important. It fills with pride.

It makes good listeners.