**Interactive Communication**

**Interactive Understanding**

**Indicating Comprehension:** Give verbal and/or nonverbal indications of having understood or not understood what was said to you, and do so in a timely fashion (i.e., immediately or very soon).

**Possible Responses to Questions**

If you **understand** the question:

1. Answer the question if you know the answer.
2. If you do not know the answer, say so.
3. Gain time to think by using **thinking noises** or **hesitation devices:**

* "Uhh" or "Umm."
* "Let's see" or "Let me think."
* "That's a good (or difficult) question."

1. Rephrase the question to check your comprehension and give you more time to think.

**Seeking Clarification:** When you do not understand, or are not sure, or need more information in order to understand fully, ask for what you need in order to reach a better understanding, e.g., by asking for repetition, spelling, explanation, or definition.

The first key to getting the information you need when you do not understand what you hear is to follow an American English pattern of conversation called **the three-second rule**. Research (McLaughlin 1984) has shown that people in the United States are uncomfortable with silences longer than three seconds, unless the conversationalists are involved in some sort of nonverbal activity. For example, after one person asks a question, if the other does not respond within three seconds, the original speaker will usually begin talking again. To respond to the question does not necessarily mean to answer the question. You may want to use a hesitation device such as "Umm" or "Let me think." Or you may want to repeat or rephrase the question to verify exactly what the question was.

If you **do not understand** the question:

1. If you are not sure why you did not understand, ask the student to repeat the question. If you still do not understand, another repetition probably will not help. Ask the student to say the question in a different way:
   * "I'm sorry, I didn't catch your question."
   * "Could you ask that another way?"

**Providing Clarification:** If your speaking partner does not understand you or needs more information, provide her with what she needs to help her better understand you.

**Active Listening**

1. **Being present.** When you listen mindfully, your focus
2. **Give yourself time:** take a minute or two to clear your mind before you meet with someone. Practice a few relaxation techniques
3. **Cultivating empathy.** When you are empathic, you can understand a situation from someone else's point of view. Validate her perspective by acknowledging her opinion.
4. **Listening to your own "cues."** Our cues are the thoughts, feelings and physical reactions that we have when we feel anxious or angry, and they can block out ideas and perspectives that we're uncomfortable with. Mindful listening can help us to be more aware of our cues, and allow us to choose not to let them block communication. Pay complete attention to the other person, and don't let other thoughts – like what you are going to say next – distract you.

Give appropriate, sufficient, and varied verbal and nonverbal feedback to what your conversation partner says, to show your ongoing attention, interest, understanding, point of view, and feelings.

* **Eye Contact and Body Language**: Sit upright facing your conversation partner. Maintain appropriate eye contact throughout the conversation. (e.g., Look at you partner most of the time while she is talking and at least half the time while you are talking.) Keep arms/hands visible (not hidden under the table). Lean slightly towards your partner from time to time.
* **Feedback**: While your partner holds the speaking turn, give non-verbal feedback (facial expressions, movements such as nodding or shaking your head back and forth, shrugging shoulders), and varied verbal feedback (such as noises and interjections, small words, indications of agreement or disagreement).

**Conversation Management**

Effectively initiate, sustain, and end a face-to-face conversation.

* **Initiating, Transitioning, and Closing**: Effectively and idiomatically begin an informal conversation or discussion (e.g., by using formulaic expressions and sequences of exchanges). Make successful transitions between topics and parts of the conversation. Appropriately and idiomatically end a conversation or discussion, without being too abrupt (e.g., by using close-initiating strategies before ending), or leaving confusion as to whether the conversation is over.
* **Sustaining and Turn-Taking**: Participate actively in and keep a conversation or discussion going by asking and answering questions, providing and asking for information and opinions, following up on information your partner provides. Take turns speaking. Ask your partner what they think, rather than only talking yourself. (Avoid long periods of silence between turns, don't monopolize the conversation by not allowing your partner sufficient turns to speak, don't remain silent while your partner does all the talking.)



